PARTISAN REVIEW

VOLUME XXV

1958

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New York 3, N. Y.

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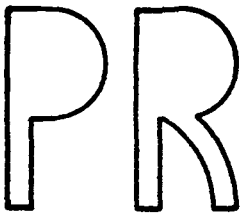

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Albert Camus

THE RENEGADE

What a jumble! What a jumble! I must tidy up my mind. Since they cut out my tongue, another tongue, it seems, has been constantly wagging somewhere in my skull, something has been talking, or someone, that suddenly falls silent and then it all begins again—oh, I hear too many things I never utter, what a jumble, and if I open my mouth it's like pebbles rattling together. Order and method, the tongue says, and then goes on talking of other matters simultaneously—yes, I always longed for order. At least one thing is certain, I am waiting for the missionary who is to come and take my place. Here I am on the trail, an hour away from Taghâsa, hidden in a pile of rocks, sitting on my old rifle. Day is breaking over the desert, it's still very cold, soon it will be too hot, this country drives men mad and I've been here I don't know how many years. . . . No, just a little longer. The missionary is to come this morning, or this evening. I've heard he'll come with a guide, perhaps they'll have but one camel between them. I'll wait, I am waiting, it's only the cold making me shiver. Just be patient a little longer, lousy slave!

But I have been patient for so long. When I was home on that high plateau of the Massif Central, my coarse father, my boorish mother, the wine, the pork soup every day, the wine above all, sour and cold, and the long winter, the frigid wind, the snowdrifts, the revolting braken—oh, I wanted to get away, leave them all at once and begin to live at last, in the sunlight, with fresh water. I believed the priest, he spoke to me of the seminary, he tutored me daily, he had plenty of time in that Protestant region where he used to hug the walls as he crossed the village. He told me of the future and of the sun, Catholicism is the sun, he used to say, and he would get me to read, he beat Latin into my hard head ('The kid's bright but

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he's pig-headed') my head was so hard that, despite all my falls, it has never once bled in my life: 'Bull-headed,' my pig of a father used to say. At the seminary they were proud as punch, a recruit from the Protestant region was a victory, they greeted me like the sun at Austerlitz. The sun was pale and feeble, to be sure, because of the alcohol, they have drunk sour wine and the children's teeth are set on edge, *gra gra,* one really ought to kill one's father, but after all there's no danger that *he*'ll hurl himself into missionary work since he's now long dead, the tart wine eventually cut through his stomach, so there's nothing left but to kill the missionary.

I have something to settle with him and with his teachers, with my teachers who deceived me, with the whole of lousy Europe, everybody deceived me. Missionary work, that's all they could say, go out to the savages and tell them: 'Here is my Lord, just look at him, he never strikes or kills, he issues his orders in a low voice, he turns the other cheek, he's the greatest of masters, choose him, just see how much better he's made me, offend me and you will see.' Yes, I believed, *gra gra,* and I felt better, I had put on weight, I was almost handsome, I wanted to be offended. When we would walk out in tight black rows, in summer, under Grenoble's hot sun and would meet girls in cotton dresses, *I* didn't look away, I despised them, I waited for them to offend me and sometimes they would laugh. At such times I would think: 'Let them strike me and spit in my face,' but their laughter, to tell the truth, came to the same thing, bristling with teeth and quips that tore me to shreds, the offense and the suffering were sweet to me! My confessor couldn't understand when I used to heap accusations on myself: 'No, no, there's good in you!' Good! There was nothing but sour wine in me, and that was all for the best, how can a man become better if he's not bad, I had grasped that in everything they taught me. That's the only thing I did grasp, a single idea and, pig-headed bright boy, I carried it to its logical conclusion, I went out of my way for punishments, I groused at the normal, in short I too wanted to be an example in order to be noticed and so that after noticing me people would give credit to what had made me better, through me praise my Lord.

Fierce sun! It's rising, the desert is changing, it has lost its mountain-cyclamen color, O my mountain, and the snow, the soft

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enveloping snow, no, it's a rather grayish yellow, the ugly moment before the great resplendence. Nothing, still nothing from here to the horizon over yonder where the plateau disappears in a circle of still soft colors. Behind me, the trail climbs to the dune hiding Taghâsa whose iron name has been beating in my head for so many years. The first to mention it to me was the half-blind old priest who had retired to our monastery, but why do I say the first, he was the only one, and it wasn't the city of salt, the white walls under the blinding sun that struck me in his account but the cruelty of the savage inhabitants and the town closed to all outsiders, only one of those who had tried to get in, one alone, to his knowledge, had lived to relate what he had seen. They had whipped him and driven him out into the desert after having put salt on his wounds and in his mouth, he had met nomads who for once were compassionate, a stroke of luck, and since then I had been dreaming about his tale, about the fire of the salt and the sky, about the House of the Fetish and his slaves, could anything more barbarous, more exciting be imagined, yes, that was my mission and I had to go and reveal to them my Lord.

They all expatiated on the subject at the seminary to discourage me, pointing out the necessity of waiting, that it was not missionary country, that I wasn't ready yet, I had to prepare myself specially, know who I was, and even then I had to go through tests, then they would see! But go on waiting, ah, no!—yes, if they insisted, for the special preparation and the try-out because they took place at Algiers and brought me closer, but for all the rest I shook my pig-head and repeated the same thing, to get among the most barbarous and live as they did, to show them at home, and even in the House of the Fetish, through example, that my Lord's truth would prevail. They would offend me, of course, but I was not afraid of offenses, they were essential to the demonstration, and as a result of the way I endured them I'd get the upper hand of those savages like a strong sun. Strong, yes, that was the word I constantly had on the tip of my tongue, I dreamed of absolute power, the kind that makes people kneel down, that forces the adversary to capitulate, converts him in short, and the blinder, the crueler he is, the more he's sure of himself, mired in his own conviction, the more his consent establishes the royalty of whoever brought about his collapse. Converting good folk

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who had strayed somewhat was the shabby ideal of our priests, I despised them for daring so little when they could do so much, they lacked faith and I had it, I wanted to be acknowledged by the torturers themselves, to fling them on their knees and make them say: 'O Lord, here is thy victory,' to rule in short by the sheer force of words over an army of the wicked. Oh, I was sure of reasoning logically on that subject, never quite sure of myself otherwise, but once I get an idea I don't let go of it, that's my strong point, yes the strong point of the fellow they all pitied!

The sun has risen higher, my forehead is beginning to burn. Around me the stones are beginning to crack open with a dull sound, the only cool thing is the rifle's barrel, cool as the fields, as the evening rain long ago when the soup was simmering, they would wait for me, my father and mother who would occasionally smile at me, perhaps I loved them. But that's all in the past, a film of heat is beginning to rise from the trail, come on, missionary, I'm waiting for you, now I know how to answer the message, my new masters taught me, and I know they are right, you have to settle accounts with that question of love. When I fled the seminary in Algiers I had a different idea of the savages and only one detail of my imaginings was true, they are cruel. I had robbed the treasurer's office, cast off my habit, crossed the Atlas, the upper plateaus and the desert, the bus-driver of the Trans-Sahara line made fun of me: 'Don't go there,' he too, what had got into them all, and the gusts of sand for hundreds of wind-blown kilometers, progressing and backing in the face of the wind, then the mountains again made up of black peaks and ridges sharp as steel, and after them it took a guide to go out on the endless sea of brown pebbles, screaming with heat, burning with the fires of a thousand mirrors, to the spot on the confines of the white country and the land of the blacks, where stands the city of salt. And the money the guide stole from me, ever naïve I had shown it to him, but he left me on the trail—just about here, it so happens—after having struck me: 'Dog, there's the way, the honor's all mine, go ahead, go on, they'll show you,' and they did show me, oh yes, they're like the sun that never stops, except at night, beating sharply and proudly, that is beating me hard at this moment, too hard, with a multitude of lances burst from the ground, oh shelter, yes shelter, under the big rock, before everything gets muddled.

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The shade here is good. How can anyone live in the city of salt, in the hollow of that basin full of dazzling heat? On each of the sharp right-angle walls cut out with a pickax and coarsely planed, the gashes left by the pickax bristle with blinding scales, pale scattered sand yellows them somewhat except when the wind dusts the upright walls and terraces, then everything shines with dazzling whiteness under a sky likewise dusted even to its blue rind. I was going blind during those days when the stationary fire would crackle for hours on the surface of the white terraces that all seemed to meet as if, in the remote past, they had all together tackled a mountain of salt, flattened it first, and then had hollowed out streets, the insides of houses and windows directly in the mass, or as if—yes, this is more like it, they had cut out their white, burning hell with a powerful jet of boiling water just to show that they could live where no one ever could, thirty days' travel from any living thing, in this hollow in the middle of the desert where the heat of day prevents any contact among creatures, separates them by a portcullis of invisible flames and of searing crystals, where without transition the cold of night congeals them individually in their rock-salt shells, nocturnal dwellers in a dried-up ice-floe, black Eskimos suddenly shivering in their cubical igloos. Black because they wear long black garments and the salt that collects even under their nails, that they continue tasting bitterly and swallowing during the sleep of those polar nights, the salt they drink in the water from the only spring in the hollow of a dazzling groove, often spots their dark garments with something like the trail of snails after a rain.

Rain, O Lord, just one real rain, long and hard, rain from your heaven! Then at last the hideous city, gradually eaten away, would slowly and irresistibly cave in and, utterly melted in a slimy torrent, would carry off its savage inhabitants toward the sands. Just one rain, Lord! But what do I mean, what Lord, they are the lords and masters! They rule over their sterile homes, over their black slaves that they work to death in the mines and each slab of salt that is cut out is worth a man in the region to the south, they pass by, silent, wearing their mourning veils in the mineral whiteness of the streets, and at night, when the whole town looks like a milky phantom, they stoop down and enter the shade of their homes where the salt walls shine dimly. They sleep with a weightless sleep and, as soon as they wake, they give orders, they strike, they say they are a united people,

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that their god is the true god, and that one must obey. They are my masters, they are ignorant of pity and, like masters, they want to be alone, to progress alone, to rule alone, because they alone had the daring to build in the salt and the sands a cold torrid city. And I. . . .

What a jumble when the heat rises, I'm sweating, they never do, now the shade itself is heating up, I feel the sun on the stone above me, it's striking, striking like a hammer on all the stones and it's the music, the vast music of noon, air and stones vibrating over hundreds of kilometers, *gra*, I hear the silence as I did once before. Yes, it was the same silence, years ago, that greeted me when the guards led me to them, in the sunlight, in the center of the square, whence the concentric terraces rose gradually toward the lid of hard blue sky sitting on the edge of the basin. There I was, thrown on my knees in the hollow of that white shield, my eyes corroded by the swords of salt and fire issuing from all the walls, pale with fatigue, my ear bleeding from the blow given by my guide and they, tall and black, looked at me without saying a word. The day was at its mid-course. Under the blows of the iron sun, the sky resounded at length, a sheet of white-hot tin, it was the same silence and they stared at me, time passed, they kept on staring at me, and I couldn't face their stares, I panted more and more violently, eventually I wept, and suddenly they turned their backs on me in silence and all together went off in the same direction. On my knees, all I could see, in the red and black sandals, was their feet sparkling with salt as they raised the long black gowns, the tip rising somewhat, the heel striking the ground lightly, and when the square was empty I was dragged to the House of the Fetish.

Squatting as I am today in the shelter of the rock and the fire above my head pierces the rock's thickness, I spent several days within the dark of the House of the Fetish, somewhat higher than the others, surrounded by a wall of salt, but without windows, full of a sparkling night. Several days, and I was given a basin of brackish water and some grain that was thrown before me the way chickens are fed, I picked it up. By day the door remained closed and yet the darkness became less oppressive, as if the irresistible sun managed to flow through the masses of salt. No lamp, but by feeling my way along the walls I touched garlands of dried palms decorating the walls and, at the end, a small door, coarsely fitted, of which I

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could make out the bolt with my finger-tips. Several days, long after—I couldn't count the days or the hours, but my handful of grain had been thrown me some ten times and I had dug out a hole for my excrements that I covered up in vain, the stench of an animal-den hung on anyway—long after, yes, the door opened wide and they came in.

One of them came toward me where I was squatting in a corner. I felt the burning salt against my cheek, I smelt the dusty scent of the palms, I watched him approach. He stopped a yard away from me, he stared at me with his metallic eyes that shone without expression in his brown horse-face, then he raised his hand. Still impassive, he seized me by the lower lip which he twisted slowly until he tore my flesh and, without letting go, made me turn around and back up to the center of the room, he pulled on my lip to make me fall on my knees there, mad with pain and my mouth bleeding, then he turned away to join the others standing against the walls. They watched me moaning in the unbearable heat of the unbroken daylight that came in the wide-open door, and in that light suddenly appeared the Sorcerer with his raffia hair, his chest covered with a breastplate of pearls, his legs bare under a straw skirt, wearing a mask of reeds and wire with two square openings for the eyes. He was followed by musicians and women wearing heavy motley gowns that revealed nothing of their bodies. They danced in front of the door at the end, but a coarse scarcely rhythmical dance, they just barely moved, and finally the Sorcerer opened the little door behind me, the masters did not stir, they were watching me, I turned around and saw the Fetish, his double ax-head, his iron nose twisted like a snake.

I was carried before him, to the foot of the pedestal, I was made to drink a black, bitter, bitter water, and at once my head began to burn, I was laughing, that's the offense, I am offended. They undressed me, shaved my head and body, washed me in oil, beat my face with cords dipped in water and salt, and I laughed and turned my head away but, each time, two women would take me by the ears and offer my face to the Sorcerer's blows while I could see only his square eyes, I was still laughing, covered with blood. They stopped, no one spoke but me, the jumble was beginning in my head, then they lifted me up and forced me to raise my

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eyes toward the Fetish, I had ceased laughing. I knew that I was now consecrated to him to serve him, adore him, no, I was not laughing any more, fear and pain stifled me. And there, in that white house, between those walls that the sun was assiduously burning on the outside, my face taut, my memory exhausted, yes, I tried to pray to the Fetish, he was all there was and even his horrible face was less horrible than the rest of the world. Then it was that my ankles were tied with a cord that permitted just one step, they danced again, but this time in front of the Fetish, the masters went out one by one.

The door once closed behind them, the music again, and the Sorcerer lighted a bark-fire around which he pranced, his long silhouette broke on the angles of the white walls, fluttered on the flat surfaces, filled the room with dancing shadows. He traced a rectangle in a corner to which the women dragged me, I felt their dry and gentle hands, they set before me a bowl of water and a little pile of grain and pointed to the Fetish, I grasped that I was to keep my eyes fixed on him. Then the Sorcerer called them one after the other over to the fire, he beat some of them who moaned and who then went and prostrated themselves before the Fetish my god, while the Sorcerer kept on dancing and he made them all leave the room until only one was left, quite young, squatting near the musicians and not yet beaten. He held her by a shock of hair which he kept twisting around his wrist, she dropped backward with eyes popping until she finally fell on her back. Dropping her, the Sorcerer screamed, the musicians turned to the wall, while behind the square-eyed mask the scream rose to an impossible pitch, and the woman rolled on the ground in a sort of fit and, at last on all fours, her head hidden in her locked arms, she too screamed, but with a hollow, muffled sound, and in this position, without ceasing to scream and to look at the Fetish, the Sorcerer took her nimbly and nastily, without the woman's face being visible, for it was covered with the heavy folds of her garment. And, wild as a result of the solitude, *I* screamed too, yes, howled with fright toward the Fetish until a kick hurled me against the wall, biting the salt as I am biting this rock today with my tongueless mouth, while waiting for the man I must kill.

Now the sun has gone a little beyond the middle of the sky. Through the breaks in the rock, I can see the hole it makes in the

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white-hot metal of the sky, a mouth voluble as mine, constantly vomiting rivers of flame over the colorless desert. On the trail in front of me, nothing, no cloud of dust on the horizon, behind me they must be looking for me, no, not yet, it's only in the late afternoon that they opened the door and I could go out a little, after having spent the day cleaning the House of the Fetish, set out fresh offerings, and in the evening the ceremony would begin, in which I was sometimes beaten, at others not, but always I served the Fetish, the Fetish whose image is engraved in iron in my memory and now in my hope also. Never had a god so possessed or enslaved me, my whole life day and night was devoted to him, and pain and the absence of pain, wasn't that joy, were due him and even, yes, desire, as a result of being present, almost every day, at that impersonal and nasty act which I heard without seeing it inasmuch as I now had to face the wall or else be beaten. But my face up against the salt, obsessed by the bestial shadows moving on the wall, I listened to the long scream, my throat was dry, a burning sexless desire squeezed my temples and my belly as in a vise. Thus the days followed one another, I barely distinguished them as if they had liquefied in the torrid heat and the treacherous reverberation from the walls of salt, time had become merely a vague lapping of waves in which there would burst out, at regular intervals, screams of pain or possession, a long ageless day in which the Fetish ruled as this fierce sun does over my house of rocks, and now as I did then, I weep with unhappiness and longing, a wicked hope consumes me, I want to betray, I lick the barrel of my gun and its soul inside, its soul, only guns have souls—oh, yes! the day they cut out my tongue, I learned to adore the immortal soul of hatred!

What a jumble, what a rage, *gra gra,* drunk with heat and wrath, lying prostrate on my gun. Who's panting here? I can't endure this endless heat, this waiting, I must kill him. Not a bird, not a blade of grass, stone, an arid desire, their screams, this tongue within me talking, and, since they mutilated me, the long, flat, deserted suffering deprived even of the water of night, the night of which I would dream, when locked in with the god, in my den of salt. Night alone with its cool stars and dark fountains could save me, carry me off at last from the wicked gods of mankind, but even locked up I could not contemplate it. If the newcomer tarries more,

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I shall see it at least rise from the desert and sweep over the sky, a cold golden vine that will hang from the dark zenith and from which I can drink at length, moisten this black dried hole that no muscle of live flexible flesh revives now, forget at last that day when madness took away my tongue.

How hot it was, really hot, the salt was melting or so it seemed to me, the air was corroding my eyes, and the Sorcerer came in without his mask. Almost naked under grayish tatters, a new woman followed him and her face, covered with a tattoo reproducing the mask of the Fetish, expressed only an idol's ugly stupor. The only thing alive about her was her thin flat body that flopped at the foot of the god when the Sorcerer opened the door of the niche. Then he went out without looking at me, the heat rose, I didn't stir, the Fetish looked at me over that motionless body whose muscles stirred gently and the woman's idol-face didn't change when I approached. Only her eyes enlarged as she stared at me, my feet touched hers, the heat then began to shriek, and the idol, without a word, still staring at me with her dilated eyes, gradually slipped onto her back, slowly drew her legs up and raised them as she gently spread her knees. But, immediately afterward, *gra,* the Sorcerer was lying in wait for me, they all entered and tore me from the woman, beat me dreadfully on the sinful place, what sin, I'm laughing, where is it and where is virtue, they clapped me against a wall, a hand of steel gripped my jaws, another opened my mouth, pulled on my tongue until it bled, was it I screaming with that bestial scream, a cool cutting caress, yes cool at last, went over my tongue. When I came to, I was alone in the night, glued to the wall, covered with hardened blood, a gag of strange smelling dry grasses filled my mouth, it had stopped bleeding, but it was vacant and in that absence the only living thing was a tormenting pain. I wanted to rise, I fell back, happy, desperately happy to die at last, death too is cool and its shadow hides no god.

I did not die, a new feeling of hatred stood up one day, at the same time I did, walked toward the door of the niche, opened it, closed it behind me, I hated my people, the Fetish was there and, from the depths of the hole in which I was I did more than pray to him, I believed in him and denied all I had believed up to then. Hail! he was strength and power, he could be destroyed but not

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converted, he stared over my head with his empty, rusty eyes. Hail! he was the master, the only lord, whose indisputable attribute was malice, there are no good masters. For the first time, as a result of offenses, my whole body crying out a single pain, I surrendered to him and approved his maleficent order, I adored in him the evil principle of the world. A prisoner of his kingdom—the sterile city carved out of a mountain of salt, divorced from nature, deprived of those rare and fleeting flowerings of the desert, preserved from those strokes of chance or marks of affection such as an unexpected cloud or a brief violent downpour that are familiar even to the sun or the sands, the city of order in short, right angles, square rooms, rigid men—I freely became its tortured, hate-filled citizen, I repudiated the long history that had been taught me. I had been misled, solely the reign of malice was devoid of defects, I had been misled, truth is square, heavy, thick, it does not admit distinctions, good is an idle dream, an intention constantly postponed and pursued with exhausting effort, a limit never reached, its reign is impossible. Solely evil can reach its limits and reign absolutely, it must be served to establish its visible kingdom, then we shall see, but what does 'then' mean, solely evil is present, down with Europe, reason, honor, and the cross. Yes, I was to be converted to the religion of my masters, yes, indeed, I was a slave, but if I too become vicious I cease to be a slave, despite my shackled feet and my mute mouth. O, this heat is driving me crazy, the desert cries out everywhere under the unbearable light, and he, the Lord of kindness, whose very name revolts me, I disown him, for I know him now. He dreamed and wanted to lie, his tongue was cut out so that his word would no longer be able to deceive the world, he was pierced with nails even in his head, his poor head, like mine now, what a jumble, how weak I am, and the earth didn't tremble, I am sure, it was not a righteous man they had killed, I refuse to believe it, there are no righteous men but only evil masters who bring about the reign of relentless truth. Yes, the Fetish alone has power, he is the sole god of this world, hatred is his commandment, the source of all life, the cool water, cool like mint that chills the mouth and burns the stomach.

Then it was that I changed, they realized it, I would kiss their hands when I met them, I was on their side, never wearying of admiring them, I trusted them, I hoped they would mutilate my people

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as they had mutilated me. And when I learned that the missionary was to come, I knew what I was to do. That day like all the others, the same blinding daylight that had been going on so long! Late in the afternoon a guard was suddenly seen running along the edge of the basin, and, a few minutes later, I was dragged to the House of the Fetish and the door closed. One of them held me on the ground in the dark, under threat of his cross-shaped sword and the silence lasted for a long time until a strange sound filled the ordinarily peaceful town, voices that it took me some time to recognize because they were speaking my language, but as soon as they rang out the point of the sword was lowered toward my eyes, my guard stared at me in silence. Then two voices came closer and I can still hear them, one asking why that house was guarded and whether they should break in the door, Lieutenant, the other said: 'No' sharply, then added, after a moment, that an agreement had been reached, that the town accepted a garrison of twenty men on condition that they would camp outside the walls and respect the customs. The private laughed, 'They're knuckling under,' but the officer didn't know, for the first time in any case they were willing to receive someone to take care of the children and that would be the chaplain, later on they would see about the territory. The other said they would cut off the chaplain's you know what if the soldiers were not there. 'Oh, no!' the officer answered, 'In fact Father Beffort will come before the garrison; he'll be here in two days.' That was all I heard, motionless, lying under the sword, I was in pain, a wheel of needles and knives was whirling in me. They were crazy, they were crazy, they were allowing a hand to be laid on the city, on their invincible power, on the true god, and the fellow who was to come would not have his tongue cut out, he would show off his insolent goodness without paying for it, without enduring any offense. The reign of evil would be postponed, there would be doubt again, again time would be wasted dreaming of the impossible good, wearing oneself out in fruitless efforts instead of hastening the realization of the only possible kingdom and I looked at the sword threatening me, O sole power to rule over the world! O power, and the city gradually emptied of its sounds, the door finally opened, I remained alone, burned and bitter, with the Fetish, and I swore to him to save my new faith, my true masters, my despotic God, to betray well, whatever it might cost me.

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Gra, the heat is abating a little, the stone has ceased to vibrate, I can go out of my hole, watch the desert gradually take on yellow and ochre tints that will soon be mauve. Last night I waited until they were asleep, I had blocked the lock on the door, I went out with the same step as usual, measured by the cord, I knew the streets, I knew where to get the old rifle, what gate wasn't guarded, and I reached here just as the night was beginning to fade around a handful of stars while the desert was getting a little darker. And now it seems days and days that I have been crouching in these rocks. Soon, soon, I hope he comes soon! In a moment they'll begin to look for me, they'll speed over the trails in all directions, they won't know that I left for them and to serve them better, my legs are weak, drunk with hunger and hate. O! over there, *gra,* at the end of the trail, two camels are growing bigger, ambling along, already multiplied by short shadows, they are running with that lively and dreamy gait they always have. Here they are, here at last!

Quick, the rifle, and I load it quickly. O Fetish, my god over yonder, may your power be preserved, may the offense be multiplied, may hate rule pitilessly over a world of the damned, may the wicked forever be masters, may the kingdom come, where in a single city of salt and iron black tyrants will enslave and possess without pity! And now, *gra gra,* fire on pity, fire on impotence and its charity, fire on all that postpones the coming of evil, fire twice, and there they are toppling over, falling, and the camels flee toward the horizon, where a geyser of black birds has just risen in the unchanged sky. I laugh, I laugh, the fellow is writhing in his detested habit, he is raising his head a little, he sees me—me his all-powerful shackled master, why does he smile at me, I'll crush that smile! How pleasant is the sound of a rifle-butt on the face of goodness, today, today at last, all is consummated and everywhere in the desert, even hours away from here, jackals sniff the non-existent wind, then set out in a patient trot toward the feast of carrion awaiting them. Victory! I raise my arms to a heaven moved to pity, a lavender shadow is just barely suggested on the opposite side, O nights of Europe, home, childhood, why must I weep in the moment of triumph?

He stirred, no the sound comes from somewhere else, and from the other direction here they come rushing like a flight of dark birds, my masters, who fall upon me, seize me, ah yes! strike, they fear their city sacked and howling, they fear the avenging soldiers I called

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forth, and this is only right, upon the sacred city. Defend yourselves now, strike! strike me first, you possess the truth! O my masters, they will then conquer the soldiers, they'll conquer the word and love, they'll spread over the deserts, cross the seas, fill the light of Europe with their black veils—strike the belly, yes, strike the eyes—sow their salt on the continent, all vegetation, all youth will die out, and dumb crowds with shackled feet will plod beside me in the world-wide desert under the cruel sun of the true faith, I'll not be alone. Ah! the pain, the pain they cause me, their rage is good and on this cross-shaped war-saddle where they are now quartering me, pity! I'm laughing, I love the blow that nails me down crucified.

How silent the desert is! Already night and I am alone, I'm thirsty. Still waiting, where is the city, those sounds in the distance, and the soldiers perhaps the victors, no, it can't be, even if the soldiers are victorious, they're not wicked enough, they won't be able to rule, they'll still say one must become better, and still millions of men between evil and good, torn, bewildered, O Fetish, why hast thou forsaken me? All is over, I'm thirsty, my body is burning, a darker night fills my eyes.

This long, this long dream, I'm awaking, no, I'm going to die, dawn is breaking, the first light, daylight for the living, and for me the inexorable sun, the flies. Who is speaking, no one, the sky is not opening up, no, no, God doesn't speak in the desert, yet whence comes that voice saying: 'If you consent to die for hate and power, who will forgive us?' Is it another tongue in me or still that other fellow refusing to die, at my feet, and repeating: 'Courage! courage! courage!'? Ah! supposing I were wrong again! Once fraternal men, sole recourse, O solitude, forsake me not! Here, here who are you, torn, with bleeding mouth, is it you, Sorcerer, the soldiers defeated you, the salt is burning over there, it's you my beloved master! Cast off that hate-ridden face, be good now, we were mistaken, we'll begin all over again, we'll rebuild the city of mercy, I want to go back home. Yes, help me, that's right, give me your hand. . . .

A handful of salt fills the mouth of the garrulous slave.

(*Translated from the French by Justin O'Brien*)

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Robert Lowell

FIVE POEMS

MEMORIES OF WEST STREET AND LEPKE

Only teaching on Tuesdays, book-worming
in pajamas fresh from the washer each morning,
I hog a whole house on Boston's
"hardly passionate Marlborough Street,"
where even the man
scavenging filth in the back alley trash cans,
has two children, a beach wagon, a help-mate,
and is a "young Republican."
I have a nine months' daughter,
young enough to be my grand-daughter.
Like the sun she rises in her flame-flamingo infants' wear.

These are the tranquillized *Fifties,*
and I am forty. Ought I to regret my seed-time?
I was a fire-breathing Catholic C. O.,
and made my manic statement,
telling off the state and President, and then
sat waiting sentence in the bull-pen
beside a Negro boy with curlicues
of marijuana in his hair.

Given a year,
I walked on the roof of the West Street Jail, a short
enclosure like my school soccer court,
and saw the Hudson River once a day
through sooty clothes-line entanglements
and bleaching khaki tenements.

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Strolling, I yammered metaphysics with Abramowitz,
a jaundice-yellow ("it's really tan")
and fly-weight pacifist,
so vegetarian,
he wore rope shoes and preferred fallen fruit.
He tried to convert Bioff and Brown,
the Hollywood pimps, to his diet.
Hairy, muscular, suburban,
wearing chocolate double-breasted suits,
they blew their tops and beat him black and blue.

I was so out of things, I'd never heard
of the Jehovah's Witnesses.
"Are you a C. O.?" I asked a fellow jailbird.
"No," he answered, "I'm a J.W."
He taught me the "hospital tuck,"
and pointed out the T-shirted back
of *Murder Incorporated*'s Czar Lepke,
there piling towels on a rack,
or dawdling off to his little segregated cell full
of things forbidden the common man:
a portable radio, a dresser, two toy American
flags tied together with a ribbon of Easter palm.
Flabby, bald, lobotomized,
he drifted in a sheepish calm,
where no agonizing reappraisal
jarred his concentration on the electric chair—
hanging like an oasis in his air
of lost connections . . .

MAN AND WIFE

Tamed by *Miltown,* we lie on Mother's bed;
the rising sun in war-paint dyes us red;
in broad daylight her gilded bed-posts shine,

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abandoned, almost Dionysian.
At last the trees are green on Marlborough Street,
blossoms on our magnolia ignite
the morning with their murderous five days' white—
all night I've held your hand,
as if you had
a fourth time faced the kingdom of the mad—
its hackneyed speech, its homicidal eye—
and dragged me home alive . . . Oh my *Petite,*
clearest of all God's creatures, still all air and nerve:
You were in your twenties, and I,
once hand on glass
and heart in mouth,
outdrank the Rahvs in the heat
of Greenwich Village, fainting at your feet—
too boiled and shy
and poker-faced to make a pass,
while the shrill verve
of your invective scorched the traditional South.

Now twelve years later, you turn your back.
Sleepless, you hold
your pillow to your hollows like a child;
your old-fashioned tirade—
loving, rapid, merciless—
breaks like the Atlantic Ocean on my head.

SKUNK HOUR

Nautilus Island's hermit
heiress still lives through winter in her Spartan cottage;
her sheep still graze above the sea.
Her son's a bishop. Her farmer
is first selectman in our village;
she's in her dotage—

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Thirsting for
the hierarchic privacy
of Queen Victoria's century,
she buys up all
the eyesores facing her shore,
and lets them fall.

The season's ill—
we've lost our summer millionaire,
who seemed to leap from an L.L. Bean
catalogue. His nine-knot yawl
was auctioned off to lobstermen.
A red fox stain covers Blue Hill.

And now our fairy
decorator brightens his shop for fall;
his fishnet's filled with orange cork,
orange, his cobbler's bench and awl;
there is no money in his work,
he'd rather marry.

One dark night,
my Tudor Ford climbed the hill's skull;
I watched for love-cars. Lights turned down,
they lay together, hull to hull,
where the graveyard shelves on the town . . .
My mind's not right—

A car radio bleats,
"Love, O careless Love . . ." I hear
my ill-spirit sob in each blood cell,
as if my hand were at its throat . . .
I myself am hell;
nobody's here—

Only skunks, that search
in the moonlight for a bite to eat.

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They march on their soles up Main Street:
White stripes, moonstruck eyes' red fire
under the chalk-dry and spar spire
of the Trinitarian Church.

I stand on top
of our back steps and breathe the rich air—
a mother skunk with her column of kittens swills the garbage pail.
She jabs her wedge-head in a cup
of sour cream, drops her ostrich tail,
and will not scare.

TO DELMORE SCHWARTZ

(Cambridge 1946)

We couldn't even keep the furnace lit!
Even when we had disconnected it,
the antiquated
refrigerator gurgled mustard gas
through your mustard-yellow house,
and spoiled our long maneuvered visit
from T. S. Eliot's brother, Henry Ware . . .

Your stuffed duck craned toward Harvard from my trunk:
its bill was a black whistle, and its brow
was high and thinner than a baby's thumb;
its webs were tough as toe-nails on its bough.
It was your first kill; you had rushed it home,
pickled in a tin wastebasket of rum—
it looked through us, as if it'd died dead drunk.
You must have propped its eyelids with a nail,
and yet it lived with us and met our stare,
Rabelaisian, lubricious, drugged. And there,
perched on my trunk and typing-table,
it cooled our universal

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Angst a moment, Delmore. We drank and eyed
The chicken-hearted shadows of the world.
Underseas fellows, nobly mad,
we talked away our friends. "Let Joyce and Freud,
the Masters of Joy,
be our guests here," you said. The room was filled
with cigarette smoke circling the paranoid,
inert gaze of Coleridge, back
from Malta—his eyes lost in flesh, lips baked and black.
Your tiger kitten, *Oranges,*
cartwheeled for joy in a ball of snarls.
You said:
"We poets in our youth begin in sadness;
thereof in the end come despondency and madness;
Stalin has had two cerebral hemorrhages!"
The Charles
River was turning silver. In the ebb-
light of morning, we stuck
the duck
-s' web-
foot, like a candle, in a quart of gin we'd killed.

"TO SPEAK OF THE WOE THAT IS IN MARRIAGE"

> "It is the future generation that presses into being by means of these exuberant feelings and supersensible soap bubbles of ours."
> —*Schopenhauer*

The hot night makes us keep our bedroom windows open.
Our magnolia blossoms. Life begins to happen.
My hopped-up husband drops his home disputes,
and hits the streets to cruise for prostitutes,
free-lancing out along the razor's edge.
This screwball might kill his wife, then take the pledge.

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Oh the monotonous meanness of his lust . . .
It's the injustice . . . he is so unjust—
whiskey-blind, swaggering home at five.
My only thought is how to keep alive.
What makes him tick? Each night now I tie
ten dollars and his car key to my thigh . . .
Gored by the climacteric of his want
he stalls above me like an elephant.

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Diana Trilling

A LETTER OF INTRODUCTION TO LAWRENCE*

Dearest Norman:**

When I saw you the other day, you asked me how my Lawrence introduction was going, whether I had finished it yet, and you forced me to the unhappy admission that it was going not at all, despite a hundred beginnings and the absolute need to be done with it this summer. Your response was what I should have foreseen it would be, one of those generational leers of yours: you knew all about me and my generation—oh, this statistical urgency of yours!—what made us comfortable and what strained us, what constituted a subject-matter and what put a block in the road. You immediately knew what was standing in my way: I was afraid to write about Lawrence because he used to be so important to me, as to most of my friends, and I used to think his ideas were *true*. Now I didn't think so any more and I was afraid to confront the reasons.

Well, for the moment I offered no dissent because—it's probably a mistake for me to confess this to you—it had seemed to me, too, that my inability to get the job done was a "resistance," a refusal of self-knowledge, and it would be fairly clear that what I would be resisting in any essay on Lawrence would be an assessment of my present-day feelings about him and the disclosure of whatever changes had taken place in me since I first read him with the sense that he was my author. He's not at all my author any more, that's sure. It doesn't occur to me to pick him up for pleasure, to learn

* This letter is an excerpt from the introduction to a selection of D. H. Lawrence's letters, to be published shortly by Farrar, Straus and Cudahy.

** Norman Podhoretz was born in 1930 and graduated from Columbia College in 1950. A literary critic, he has contributed to many periodicals including *Commentary, The New Yorker, Partisan Review, Scrutiny,* and *The New Leader.*

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something that would make my life nicer or bigger, although there never was an author who consciously undertook to make life so large. When I read Lawrence today it is to add to my knowledge of *him*, not to my imagination of *me*, and this change might certainly have its disconcerting personal implications.

But then, what do you read Lawrence for, Norman, you who were so barely born the year he died? To learn about you? I doubt it. The situation is as archeological for you as it is for me; there are always these unfathomable reaches of History which you in some subtle fashion put between yourself and anything that happened before this very instant. I'm talking not only of you, of course, or of the things you've written, but of an anxiety about time which seems to me to be common among your literary contemporaries: you all have this sense of time as a kind of cultural bulldozer laying total waste to the land with each flip of the calendar, you're as sensitive to the shifts in decades as we were to the passage of a century. For all of you an examination of yourselves as you were yesterday is like an adventure into a lost civilization. It's what accounts of course for your shared precocity, the speed and thoroughness with which you leave your yesterdays behind you. But it's also what accounts for your *schmerz,* the big hole at the center of your present which you wait for the future to fill. You like to blame this emptiness on your immediate culture rather than on a defect in your historical connection. Your refusal of any but your strictly contemporary experience, a refusal which is implicit in your compulsive historicity—this is the way it was in the '20s, this is the way it was in the '30s—is resistance in its essence, a rejection of the very idea of self-knowledge whose core, after all, is a recognition that the human circumstance is not one's own invention.

But to get back to my difficulties with Lawrence. It was surely quite possible that I was reluctant to retrace my experience of so personally involving an author. It had also occurred to me that perhaps I had talked myself out: it always makes an interesting speculation why an author is suddenly revived; in the last year or two Lawrence has strangely reappeared in our conversational lives, people seem to be clumsily edging up to the notion that perhaps here is a man who still has something to say to us. But now I know this isn't the explanation either, I've discovered what has really been troubling

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me. It's not that I hesitate to re-examine Lawrence's ideas—and we of course mean his sexual ideas—and I find I have more things I'd like to say than there are people to listen. But they're of a random personal kind that balks at the conventions of a formal literary essay, it's the literariness that stops me, the orderliness of presentation and the pedagogic attitude conventionally required of an introduction. I've actually written of Lawrence only once before but I become claustrophobic at the thought of plowing over the same old ground again, about how Lawrence was born in 1885 and died of tuberculosis in 1930 and how he was the son of a coal-miner father and a schoolteacher mother and how he loved his mother too much and it made him nervous and about how he was a poet and therefore mustn't be read literally, but a poet without an esthetic other than his doctrine, his doctrine *was* his esthetic, and about how his doctrine has been distorted by people who haven't bothered to read him thoroughly and about how his doctrine has been misread even by people who have read him more or less thoroughly because it assaults their most precious assumptions etc. etc. It isn't that the old ground is no longer fertile; there's not an inch of it but would yield. And I don't ignore the requirements of conscience in writing about Lawrence, the need for a special sanity and balance of the sort we like to think is pedagogic and which does of course finally rest on one's willingness to school oneself in what Lawrence actually wrote and intended: there are so many and such assorted irresponsibilities Lawrence has suffered. But surely one can be as responsible outside as within the established forms, just as one can often best comprehend an object by the full indulgence of one's subjectivity, Lawrence in his travel writing being a classic instance. I'm all at once impatient of an objectivity which adds up to little more than submitting to a convention of literary address and moderating one's voice. I especially want to take Lawrence, who is always written about so grimly, out of the study into the living room where I can be easy and unsolemn, or I want to write a letter, this letter. Lawrence needs to be gossiped about, he was that kind of man and writer; he needs to be come at with as much human immediacy as one can manage.

There's the matter of Frieda Lawrence, for instance. She was a Lawrence *fact,* a human fact of the greatest significance in Law-

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rence's literary career. How can one write about the author of these letters and ignore the wife who was so consistently at his shoulder when he was writing most of them? It's absurd the way criticism and even biography are willing to explore every influence that touches a writer except the woman he marries. Why are Lawrence's letters so wonderful, the best in modern literature and second only to Keats's in the whole history of English literature, except that they are so absolutely personal, so close to home, so miraculously without an eye to posthumous publication? If we don't hesitate to read a man's mail, if we don't hesitate to read letters even as personal as these of Lawrence, why should we scruple to read such a public statement as his choice of a wife? I want to start with Frieda and throw her out as an institutional piety; instead I'll embrace her for the big, significant, soft, silly reality she actually was. It's no accident that a man marries the woman he marries and if he's a writer, sooner or later he'll somehow explain his choice in his books. But sometimes it's easier, and it should always be thought more respectable, to get at the books through the wife than at the wife through the books.

I'll begin with Frieda, then, and tell you what I think of her but you must keep in mind that I *really* know nothing about her, I've never even known anyone who met her. I think Frieda was a bit of a swamp, and this, dear Norman, is literary criticism, impressionistic to be sure, but literary criticism nonetheless, whatever its high savor of gossip; it has directly to do with the kind of writer Lawrence was. She had a swampy mind and spirit, she had no intellect, no real intelligence, yet she had wits; she was shrewd like so many Continental and so few American women, she had her own kind of innocence but it was not of the sort which is so continuing and inexplicable a fact of our American ineptitude. No American woman, no matter how gifted in masochism—and we make a female specialty of it in this country, it's part of our pioneer heritage—could have been married to Lawrence without going mad; perhaps even a Frenchwoman married to Lawrence would have gone mad. It took a German woman like Frieda to stay entirely sane and make a successful career of the lunacy of her marriage.

Now we must remember that in a way she had been bred for her fate, unlike our Bennington girls, the ones who look to art and

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lunacy for their personal salvation. For our poor girls, the lunatic life of art has only a negative force, it's the obverse of the mental-health culture in which they have been reared. But Frieda, being German, had a large cultural support when she chose Lawrence. Lunacy *was* mental health in post-war Germany and so far as Frieda is concerned it doesn't make the least bit of difference that she was chronologically pre-war, almost forty and long removed from Germany by the time the war ended; she seems to me to have been entirely typical of Germany in the years after the first war—being an aristocrat, she was no doubt ahead of herself; the upper classes, especially in Europe, always move in advance of their national culture, they can afford to take more chances. To make a successful life on the slippery edge of madness was the progressive thing for someone of Frieda's background to do, like wandering around with a knapsack or painting wooden bowls. Essentially there was a good deal of the *wandervogel* in Frieda throughout her life and Lawrence liked it in her although it also made trouble between them as it would no doubt have gone on to make trouble for Lady Chatterley and Mellors if the book hadn't ended when it did: you'll remember Constance Chatterley and her sister had had German, not English, young womanhoods. Was it Frieda or was it Lawrence—I think it was Frieda—who said she had been in a sleep when Lawrence found her, the wife of a Nottingham professor of languages, pouring tea while her three children romped on the lawn? She had whiled away some of the tedium of faculty life with an inconsequential adultery or two, but we can guess that it wasn't sex that had impelled her to her infidelities any more than it was sex speaking when she invited Lawrence to stay the night in the absence of Professor Weekley —not sex, that is, in primary terms. Do I do Frieda an injustice? —I always have this impression that it was art or, rather, creativeness that was the great imperative for her; sex was just a secondary gain in the life of self-expression. Lawrence brought Frieda into the full tumultuous tide of creative living, eventually he made her famous, which was its own immaculate pleasure, but right from the start he gave her the creative status which Weekley couldn't provide, he made her the woman behind his genius which is so much more what women seem to want than being geniuses themselves. We have it in Frieda's own words in her foolish memoir of her husband where

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she says with the catastrophic naïveté which is her style, "I had always regarded Lawrence's genius as given to me. I felt deeply responsible for what he wrote." More revealing than the remark itself is its context, an account of Lawrence's relation with Mabel Dodge Luhan; it seems that Mabel and Lawrence wanted to do a book together, it was to be about Mabel, and Frieda explains her position: "I did not want this. I had always regarded Lawrence's genius as given to me." It's from passages like this that I draw my impression that for Frieda art rather outranked sex. But Lawrence could have been a bad artist and it would have been all the same to Frieda so long as he was for self-expression in the largest possible quantity; she had no taste, as we mean the exercise of artistic judgment. But then neither had Lawrence; Lawrence never thought of art in terms of taste any more than he thought of art in terms of permanence. The value for Lawrence of a created work lay not in its lastingness or in its conformity to esthetic standard but in its rightness at the moment and for its creator, in its usefulness as a form of personal communication. He cared just as much about his painting as about his writing and he wasn't a very good painter; and he could devote himself to embroidery and the decoration of little boxes with the same casual gravity he gave to his major literary efforts. Is it funny that I use the word "casual" of Lawrence? It's the accurate word. Certainly there was never a writer who took himself so solemnly as a human being but so unsolemnly as an artist.

I don't for a moment mean that Lawrence was unsolemn about the content of his books or even about their method. He was always the subject of his books and he regarded himself as the most serious subject in the world. And he was a very conscious artist, he was anything but the primitive some of his critics have made him out to be; nothing could have been more intellectualized than his theory of the unconscious source of art. But he never "saw himself" as an artist, only as a person and workman; although his extraordinary gifts were recognized unusually early in his career, it never occurred to him to suppose they earned him any privilege in society. Writing was simply the way he made his living as someone else made his by carpentry or ditch-digging and he did it as competently and quietly as if ours were a world in which as much status accrued to a carpenter as to a literary celebrity. Because he attracted to himself

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a group of followers for whom he was prophet and savior, and manifestly enjoyed the role, we tend to accuse him of playing artist to the philistines. But this is a mistake, he never bullied people with his artistic superiority, only with his messianism; he never asked or claimed a superior social or personal place on the basis of his talents or their recognition. As an artist he was the most unassuming man who ever lived. It is also a mistake to think of Lawrence, as we are likely to, as one of those instances of unacknowledged or unrewarded genius whose recollection is supposed to fortify the rising artist against a life of failure. Lawrence suffered enormous hardship; he was ill, he was poor, he had great trouble with the press, he was persecuted by the law, he was accused of being a German spy in the war, with alarming regularity his best friends became his public enemies. But there have been few serious let alone revolutionary artists whose right to special critical notice was won so fast and surely. He stopped teaching with the publication of his first novel, *The White Peacock,* which, incidentally, had been taken by the first publisher who saw it, and never again attempted to earn his living except by writing—in any writer's life this implies a large demand on society and a considerable victory if it is managed even meagerly. And despite the hostility which he generated every step of his way, the sheer power of his gift imposed itself unusually early, demanded and received its acknowledgment no matter how grudging or unsympathetic. From the very beginning he was always thought of as a genius and, after all, that isn't the common way we mask our dislikes.

But I have wandered too far from Frieda and her first marriage and Professor Weekley. Poor Professor Weekley: I gather he was something of a scholar, he wrote a whole series of books on etymology, but I'm afraid this doesn't make him the less dim. As he comes through the letters and biographies he seems to have been a person of low emotional intensity and high self-conscious principle who, having once laid successful claim to a woman of spirit, felt he owed it to himself never again to settle for less. I can scarcely suppose he was quite as awful as Lawrence pictures him in the letter to Amy Lowell where he describes Frieda's interview with him when she returned to England in 1914, two years after the elopement. It's a brilliant letter but somehow Lawrence's effort to make Weekley into the very image of castrated middle-class respectability, calling

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Frieda a prostitute and refusing her all communication with her children, doesn't ring entirely true for me; I have an idea that Lawrence is projecting into Weekley an aspect of his own judgment on Frieda and himself. Lawrence had been miserable about his equivocal situation with Frieda in the two years between the elopement and their marriage; whenever he thought people mistakenly assumed they were married, he hurried to set the record straight. He had wanted this married woman and he had had the courage to take what he wanted, perhaps it was even an important condition of his love for Frieda that she was already another man's wife and a mother; he overrode Frieda's hesitations in fine style and got her to run off with him. But he hated living with her without marriage, it shocked him and he expected others to be shocked. The worst of which I seem to be able to accuse Weekley in the scene Lawrence recreates is a certain hamming and an inadequate imagination in supposing he could outmatch Lawrence by taking a high moral line: this was Lawrence's game and was there anyone to beat him at it? I didn't guess it from Lawrence's reports of Weekley, actually I learned it from Harry Moore's biography, but I suppose I should have been able to figure out that Weekley wanted Frieda the more, not the less, because she had left him for Lawrence: twenty years later, when Lawrence died, Weekley asked her to come back to him and I find this touching, it quite rounds out my image of him, that he had held on to Frieda all these years as the test of his manliness. It's like something in a Lawrence novel, isn't it, but Weekley was precisely like someone in a Lawrence novel, one of those men who need a woman like Frieda to validate their masculinity. Lawrence needed a woman like Frieda himself, to validate his masculinity too, which not only identifies him with Weekley but also with all his other Weekley characters, including Clifford Chatterley, all the frightened insufficient men in his novels who depend on women for their strength. This of course is the confusing thing about Lawrence and his books. Everybody knows Lawrence was representing an image of himself in the gamekeeper Mellors in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. But Lawrence was not only Mellors in that novel, he was Clifford Chatterley as well. Lawrence is not only the heroes in his fiction but the villains too, which is what licenses the cruelty in his books. This is what licenses

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Lawrence's quite extreme cruelty to Clifford Chatterley: Chatterley is himself.

I'm convinced Frieda was the best possible, indeed the only possible wife for Lawrence. She had a lot of strength, she was *there,* yet she was sufficiently amorphous to mold herself to any notion of femaleness Lawrence needed to impress upon her. She must have been an awful nuisance the way he couldn't even write a letter without her telling him where she agreed and disagreed and adding her own postscripts à la Lawrence, and it's embarrassing how she tried to ape his style. *His* style, of all things for a German lady to ape! But he loved it, of course, when they were newly together—he was twenty-seven when they eloped, she was thirty-three and she must have been still open and sweet-looking then; she aged badly, from the pictures one gathers she became both sharp and overblown, a bit witch-like—and it was very shrewd of him to have chosen her, very therapeutic. Do you remember his remark about how he believed in art, not for art's sake, but for his own sake? "One sheds one's sicknesses in books, repeats and presents again one's emotions in order to master them." His marriage as well as his art was a place where he repeated and presented again his emotions in order to try to master them; it was a proving ground for the material of his books and he was very fortunate to have found a woman who was sufficiently passive and masochistic to accept this therapeutic use of her. Not that Frieda was quiet or withdrawn, she was far from being one of those docile women who confirm their femininity by a refusal of self-assertion; in fact, she seems to have made her presence known a good deal more noisily than many women who have far less instinct for emotional subservience. She could lose her temper at will and act rudely; she seemed to equate smashing dishes and throwing things with both class and femaleness, like those movies of ten or fifteen years ago in which the well-reared heroine finally captivates her lover by breaking a vase over his head. But Lawrence was no mean hand at making scenes himself and if we are even partly to trust the memoirists, he could be savage and ugly whereas Frieda was only elaborate. There's the bad story, for instance, that Witter Bynner tells in *Journey with Genius* of Lawrence having the bootblacks of Chapala arrested and jailed—they hadn't the money to pay their fines—because they had come to solicit business on the

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terrace of a hotel where the Lawrences were dining and where the youngsters were supposed not to intrude. I can't think Bynner was making up that story any more than I can suppose Mabel Dodge Luhan was wholly fabricating her account, in *Lorenzo in Taos,* of the evening she and Lawrence danced around her living-room, bumping into Frieda and her partner as often and hard as they could in a kind of hysteria of jealousy until all four of them were black and blue and breathless. Frieda was too much a born lady to take out her angers on a lot of poor ragamuffins just as she was too much a born fool not simply to sit down instead of letting herself be bumped. I'm afraid Lawrence could be unpleasant like few people one wants to respect; it's hard to put from one's mind the letter he wrote Katherine Mansfield: "I loathe you. You revolt me stewing in your consumption. . . . The Italians were quite right to have nothing to do with you." That was in 1920 when Katherine Mansfield was very ill and Lawrence had not yet learned of his own tuberculosis. But perhaps he already had his premonitions; as I say, one can only be that cruel if it is oneself who is attacked. But surely no one but Frieda could have lived with such a man and it's no use Aldous Huxley telling us how sweet and gentle Lawrence could be, we know from the letters that he was capable of sweetness and gentleness, they're full of the evidence of his endearing human qualities. But he was also half crazy and Frieda knew it and was able to sustain it. If Frieda had had a mind, she would of course have lost it trying to understand Lawrence, and Lawrence would have been ruined both as a person and a writer. Frieda was Lawrence's therapy but fortunately she didn't cure Lawrence, a cured Lawrence would have been no Lawrence at all. In her mindlessness, she held Lawrence together, that was all, and she performed a great service to literature.

But of course I am using the word "mind" here in a way that is almost as confusing as Lawrence's use of it when he took his doctrinal stand against the mental consciousness. To be sure, Frieda had no intellect in the sense that Lawrence had such a first-rate endowment of mental power: T. S. Eliot to the contrary notwithstanding, Lawrence was a very well-educated man with a quite remarkable capacity for quick learning, especially in his earlier years he read widely and closely. Frieda had a perfectly competent organ of understanding in her head, it was just that it operated behind

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rather than in advance of her feelings, she felt her way with Lawrence instead of thinking her way. "To know the *mind* of a woman," Lawrence wrote in a letter to Dr. Trigant Burrow, "is to end in hating her. . . . Between man and woman it's a question of understanding *or* love. . . ." It would have been closer to the matter if he had written that to know the mind of a man is to end in hating him since obviously Lawrence was much more concerned to defend men against being understood by women than to defend women against being understood by men; we know that from as far back as *Sons and Lovers*. It wasn't intellect, however, that he wished to preserve from comprehension. In the same letter to Dr. Burrow he goes on to define love as the "pre-cognitive flow" and we are at once aware of what it is he means by mind and what he opposes to understanding. Love is the state of affectional, quite animal connection between two people such as exists between mother and child in the child's infancy; understanding is the operative force which enters into this relationship when the social connection replaces the earlier physical connection. In all his adult life, in all his life with Frieda, Lawrence looked to reproduce the non-cognitive connection of this earliest love experience, his infant experience. It is what he meant by the blood consciousness which he offered as his alternative to mental consciousness, the opposition which plays such a basic part in his attack upon modern civilization. Frieda had enough intelligence of feeling—female intuition, if you will—to recognize Lawrence's need for the kind of love he had once known in the infancy of his life and enough undifferentiated maternal impulse to satisfy this need as far as it can ever be satisfied in a grown man. She couldn't make Lawrence happy, no woman could have, but better than anyone we can imagine she met the first enormous requirement Lawrence imposed on her, it is the same requirement he imposes on us as his readers—that we suspend the usual exercise of reason and the usual impulses of common sense and self-protection in order to receive such beneficence as this man of genius has within his giving. Frieda was knowing, as a mother is, but we can put it that she didn't have to understand what she knew about Lawrence any more than a mother has to understand what she knows about her infant; and that is why she didn't have to end in hating Lawrence and in destroying him and herself.

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But she had her bad times nonetheless, of this there can be no question; the two of them had a great talent for making each other miserable. Lawrence might write of himself, "I shall do my work for women, better than the Suffrage," but even Frieda must have had her moments when she would have settled for the vote and a less strenuous husband, especially in the war years. Those war years! It's odd, the way the biographers always take what Lawrence says at its face value when they come to dealing with the depression he ascribes to his hatred of the war and skip the looming fact that the outbreak of the war and the outbreak of Lawrence's first period of acute emotional disturbance coincided almost exactly with the legitimization of his union with Frieda. The final divorce decree came on May 28, 1914; Frieda and Lawrence were married on July 13, 1914. For two years they had been in exile from England, now they could be legal and they returned to England, to set up life together as a respectable married couple. And war was declared!

For all their self-revelation, there are extraordinary reticences in Lawrence's letters. There is no hint, for instance, in the Huxley volume of what we learn from Moore's biography, that all the time Lawrence was writing *Sons and Lovers* in Italy he was in correspondence with Jessie Chambers, the Miriam of the novel, sending her his manuscript so that she could verify or correct his account of their earlier relationship. It's one of the creepiest episodes in Lawrence's history, the two of them, Lawrence and Frieda, sitting there poring over Jessie's detailed revisions of Lawrence's earlier love affair while back in England, alone, Jessie dug and dug, dredging up every last memory as she cherished it, insisting that Lawrence do her the justice in fiction that she felt he had denied her in real life. What price both art *and* truth! Maybe—we hope—Lawrence was ashamed of himself and that's why he doesn't tell Garnett, say, what he's doing. But this isn't the only place where the letters can be misleading if they are taken as the sole or chief biographical source. If we compare the poems in the *Look! We Have Come Through!* volume with the letters Lawrence wrote in the same period, the correspondence is far from adequate in suggesting the torments Lawrence apparently went through in his life with Frieda after their elopement, Frieda insisting, for one thing, that a mother has a perfect right to miss her children. Instances like these warn us that the

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books and letters not only must be read together if we are properly to understand either but also that there is still room for conjecture all around the biographical record; they license my suspicion that Lawrence's recorded feelings about the war—the many letters he wrote about his hatred of the war and the famous passages in *Kangaroo*—were very possibly a cover for other emotions he was experiencing at that time of which he was not permitting himself so much awareness.

To feel, as I do, that it was not the war alone but the fortuitous combination of war and his marriage that brought Lawrence so close to the breaking point after he returned to England in 1914 is obviously not to minimize the violence of his response to the war. Anyone who allows himself fully to contemplate the organized butchery in which whole societies can indulge themselves is bound to be pushed toward insanity, and Lawrence was not one to spare himself, or us, any final confrontation. Then too, in his inordinate reaction to the simple routines of physical examination, we necessarily read Lawrence's unconscious fear of the homosexual temptations of army life: surely more than even extraordinary sensitivity is involved in Lawrence's horror because he had to queue up with the other men and submit to medical examination, including an inspection of his genitals. The fact of his marriage to Frieda—I don't mean the mere mention that the marriage has taken place but what it weighed as an emotional event—is conspicuously missing from his correspondence that fall and winter. War, war, war is his obsession, we hear its rumble even through some of the best descriptive writing he ever did and some of his most beautiful passages of nature writing.

In terms of his well-being, I think it was disastrous for Lawrence to have married; it would have been better for him if he had continued to live with Frieda without institutionalizing the relationship. To legalize their union was to bring Lawrence's sexual feeling for Frieda into the atmosphere of social regularity and conventional family emotion; that is, it brought sex into established connection with love—you know, like the song: love and marriage go together like a horse and carriage. Lawrence wanted Frieda to love him like a mother but the moment they were bound together in the institution of marriage, it was as if Frieda was institutionalized in the mother position, it was as if she had become the very mother person from

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whom she had been supposed to detach him. You remember how, in writing about the Morel boys in *Sons and Lovers,* Lawrence said, "As soon as the young men come into contact with women, there's a split. William gives his sex to a fribble and his mother holds his soul." Well, the split was bad and Lawrence had looked to Frieda to put the pieces together, to unite soul and body as Jessie Chambers had been incapable of doing. But in actuality this was not at all the service Frieda had performed. On the contrary, she had kept soul and sex apart or at least unlegalized in their union, until now the marriage took place and sex and love were presented to Lawrence in the person of a wife. I think it was this institutionalized conjunction of sex and love that threw Lawrence into the despair of the war years. The conflict raging in the world was an externalized expression of the private sexual struggle which was to absorb so large a part of his emotional energies for the rest of his life.

This is no irrelevant private point I'm making, no psychoanalytical advantage I'm trying to take of Lawrence, need I make that clear? The conflict which was crystallized in Lawrence when he and Frieda finally married seems to me to be the essential conflict, and contradiction, that runs through all his work. Lawrence wanted to rid sex of its usual paraphernalia of love emotions, he wanted the sexual relation to be rid of the "mental" trappings which he felt were so destructive of the dark mysterious physical connection. But he also wanted love to be totally assimilated into the sexual experience, he feared to give the sexual emotions any autonomy unless they were sanctified by love. It was a conflict so strong and so deeply rooted in his own personal history that it was impossible of resolution and it accounts, in my opinion, for our inability ever finally to understand what Lawrence is driving toward in his fiction, our inability ever to parse either his plots or his characters and finally say, with any conviction of accuracy, just what it is he *approves* in the relations between his heroes and heroines. We know of what Lawrence disapproves, we know he disapproves of all assertions of will and all sexual behavior which has mere sensation as its goal. But even here he is ambiguous, flagrantly so at times. In the character of Mellors, for example, it's impossible to distinguish what Lawrence would call an assertion of will from what he presents to us as an expression of the gamekeeper's inviolable masculinity and wholly admirable pride. And

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surely it is difficult to rid Mellors's exercises in sensuality of the charge that they are efforts—and why not, indeed?—to achieve new sensations, new thrills. It's striking that Lawrence never tells us what Mellors and Constance Chatterley actually do on their big sensual excursion; this is the one sexual scene in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* where Lawrence himself did the expurgating. We can conjecture that he drew back at this point as much because he realized he was violating a cardinal tenet of his own faith—his injunction against sensation-seeking—as because of his puritanism.

Whoever has read Lawrence with any thoroughness and tried to grasp his sexual doctrine must at last ask himself, what did Lawrence *really* want of the relationship between a man and a woman, not in metaphoric terms—in the realm of metaphor we accept the fact that we are expected to make our own interpretations and that we may be mistaken—but in didactic terms. (This is another of the contradictions in Lawrence: so much a poet, he yet insists that we read him as a preacher.) Does he want sex without love? Obviously not. Does he want love without sex? Obviously not. Does he want sex and love together? Well, yes and no. Certainly he wants them in conjunction more than he wants them separate, and yet when he puts them in conjunction he is at once and quite automatically driven to attack the quality either of the love or of the sex. The answer is, I'm afraid, that he wants neither sex nor love but some combined transcendence of both, a transcendence that has its source and fulfillment only in phantasy. This transcendence he calls marriage. "Your most vital necessity in this life," he wrote Dunlop, the friendly consul at Spezia, "is that you shall love your wife completely and implicitly and in entire nakedness of body and spirit. . . . You asked me once what my message was . . . this that I tell you is my message as far as I've got any." And you recall that little story he wrote called "Love" in which the girl refuses adoration, appreciation, caressing, anything we commonly think of as love-making. She doesn't want her sweetheart to touch her and yet it's not that she is averse to sexuality, it's just that she wants no demonstrations either of physical or spiritual courtship, all she wants is marriage. Marriage was Lawrence's message. But no marriage on land or sea, Norman; no marriage you or I have ever known, no marriage he had ever known. Lawrence spoke about marriage as he spoke about a return

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to the dark gods of an earlier civilization than our Hebraic-Christian civilization, as a metaphor against loneliness. His message makes no reasonable sense: when was there ever an entire nakedness of body and spirit between a man and a woman, it's rather dreadful to contemplate. But of course his message makes sense as poetry, as an overleap of the imagination in order to dramatize the insufficiency of our ordinary civilized sexual relationships.

I read Lawrence today and I'm utterly confounded by the effect he had on me and my friends when we first read him: we thought his metaphors were translatable into a program for practical conduct! We knew he addressed himself to us not on behalf of a new way of acting but a new way of being. We understood, of course—after all, we weren't stupid—that his sociology, his politics, his anthropology, his religion were all of them directed only to the quality of being which Lawrence hoped to produce; we never read *The Plumed Serpent* as a defense of Hitler or Mussolini, we knew he didn't mean us to run around like Aztecs or Incas or whatever they were. Yet in the sexual sphere we seemed to find in his books a literal sanction which literally is not there—the sanction for a free, even an experimental sexuality, and we recognized neither the contradictions in his doctrine nor its abstraction from reality. Since Lawrence's morality had to do with the kind of person one is and since all this thinking had as its object the discovery of a better way of being, both of which preoccupations are of course wholly in line with the concerns of the romantic poets, we read Lawrence like the last of the romantics, a bit on the mystical side but still the most intense and personal of the romantic idealists, the one who imposed on us the heaviest burden of self-consciousness and self-realization, as it used to be called. In our effort to meet his high challenge to self-awareness, we failed to perceive that there is no world for Lawrence's people, that they are isolated in their intensity, and that he doesn't permit *us* to live in the actual world—this and his profound sexual puritanism, the fact that he licenses sex only as a sacrament.

You're wiser in your generation, Norman, than we were about Lawrence; no, not wiser, keener. Having been born in the years of the economic depression gives you a keener nose for reality and a quicker instinct to protect practice against theory, which is also why you're less generous than we were. You're more acute in your read-

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ing of Lawrence because you're less generous in your imagination of heroism; transcendence worries you, perhaps a little too much. You immediately smell out Lawrence's remoteness from actual life and his restrictiveness, you know that if you take him literally he would pull you after himself into some unwholesome morass and that he doesn't represent the romantic ideal of freedom. Steve Marcus, for instance, says that after a bout of Lawrence he always turns to Colette: we would have scorned such an idea, thought it frivolous, but Steve is right of course and we were wrong: as a sexual writer, Colette is exactly the indicated antidote to Lawrence. And yet I wonder. I wonder if this reality principle of yours doesn't define a weakness as much as a strength. At least we hoped ourselves capable of ultimate emotion, ultimate vision, ultimate experience and, measuring our capacity, we were willing to make mistakes; we didn't enter maturity, like you who, born in the depression, still remain determinists of every kind except economic, all set to accept whatever limitations on our being and call them our fate. We didn't invoke reality only as a negative force, only as a restriction of possibility; there were times when we supposed reality was on our side. Dear Norman, there surely is much to be said for a view of life, like Lawrence's, which not only refuses the simple on the sole ground that it is less than the complex but which also insists that we make our own conditions and that our fate can be grand. . . .

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Claude Vigée

REVOLT AND PRAISE: CONTEMPORARY FRENCH POETRY

The last decade of French poetry cannot be understood in isolation. It must be interpreted in connection with the major tendencies of Western sensibility manifested in the past hundred years, if not since the beginnings of Romanticism and the anti-Christian revolt of the Renaissance. There the seeds were sown whose strange fruit Faustian man, evolving from classical rationalism to romantic self-love and to modern nihilism, is still reaping. Poetry recapitulates, or reenacts within its own frame, the moral and spiritual drama through which our entire culture passes. The seeming obscurity of its present condition stems from the fact that poetry, normally engaging the totality of values attached to earthly existence, is now attempting to do it when an order of values and the very notion of value are lacking in Western mankind. Poetry testifies for man; it can only be what he makes of himself.

French poetry since the end of the eighteenth century exhibits a remarkable continuity, in spite of the changes which have occurred in its vocabulary, syntax, prosody, its use of imagery and symbols. When we consider its main landmarks, the decades leading from the Romantic world-flight to the Parnassian ivory-tower, and later to Baudelaire and the Symbolists, from Mallarmé's aesthetic nihilism to the ascetic intellectualism of Valéry, from Dada's radical negation to the Surrealist's escape into the uncanny (which is but an extreme regression towards the initial Romantic revolt)—these decades appear as phases of *transition* within a single temporal organism, which is still under the spell of romanticism. Our own epoch continues the main trends of the last two centuries, but in a form of its own. It does not prolong them; it brings them to their conclusion, and in this sense stands in fundamental opposition to them.

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In the course of human history it is possible to distinguish between minor and major cycles, to discover, beyond the stretches of continuity and internal evolution, great discontinuities, basic revolutions embracing all activity and opposing it to that of the preceding age. It appears that we find ourselves today in such a split between two systems of culture and life-experience. Instead of transition, then, another term, that of liquidation, might prove more useful in speaking of our time. However, as in any disruptive moment of history, this negative description covers but half of the truth. The quest for a new sense of reality constitutes the other facet of this harsh double process, revealing itself not only in the making of poetry, but in all present-day occupations of man, practical as well as intellectual: modern man paradoxically searches for birth only through death, which he therefore deals out and receives with an equal eagerness.

We find ourselves in a period of breakdown, with which even the established nihilistic literature has been late in catching up. How shall the Yes ever be uttered by a despairing, rebellious Faustian mouth, trained to say No by a century-old cultural and social mechanism to which we have become accustomed as to a second nature? *"Tu ne sais que nier,"* say the fairies to Valéry's disdainful Faust, who refuses to be reborn. Moreover, to which object, to which universe would this problematic "Yes" become attached, in the midst of "the universal decay of all life-contents" (G. Benn)?—in an atmosphere which the contemporary French poet Lucien Becker summed up in the significant title *Rien à Vivre*? Our legacy is that of a dead God, a dead world, and an ineffectual power of speech. On the one hand liquidation of the already classical heritage bequeathed by the nihilistic sensibility of the last hundred years and on the other the quest of a real world where man can at long last live with his song instead of adopting *la chanson du néant* as a substitute for life—between these polar opposites, the tension-ridden French poetry of the forties and fifties develops its difficult span.

As a reaction against these two almost impossible tasks there are inevitably movements seeking to return to the multiple Western tradition. Some of them appeal once more to classical formalism; others suggest a return to the nihilistic aestheticism of the late nineteenth century. Inasfar as they escape the grip of orthodox nihilism, our poets are often divided among these regressive temptations bring-

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ing reassurance and consolation, and the contradictory attempts to explore the unheard of universe lying beyond nihilism, whose frontiers Nietzsche had in vain tried to force.

The main reproach addressed to those poets who rose to prominence during the Second World War as the voice of the Resistance, is that they mixed up the card-game of poetry under the cover of the national emergency. They are accused of having spoken as if the world still (or already) possessed values, as if the rhetoric of great sentiments belonged to the natural order of contemporary things, whereas the eloquent language of *l'engagement,* far from being the direct echo of such values, represented but the shadow of a shade. It thus turns into a suspect instrument *par excellence.* The refusal to be further deceived about the authentic position of man in our time in part explains the more rigorous tone and technique, the ethical and formal touchiness, the critical attitude characteristic of much of post-war French poetry.

The post-war period of 1919, after the nihilistic episode of Dada, had seen the rise of the Surrealist revolt: André Breton conceived of his movement as "creating light." Today there are no such new fireworks. The most significant poets of our time devote themselves to a patient struggle against the darkness of the human condition as it is, in real rather than surreal circumstances. A tone different from that of the apocalypse or from militant heroism again became necessary. But among the poets who came to the fore after 1945, this tone still retains the echoes of the preceding trial period. As the publication, around 1946, of *Feuillets d'Hypnos,* and *Le Poème Pulvérisé* evidenced, it is preoccupations of a moral nature which obsess the poets of the past decade, exactly as they haunt the newer prose-writers (J. P. Sartre, A. Camus, etc). This distinguishes them from their predecessors. The increased awareness of *l'écriture,* the taste for poetic craftsmanship, so striking in Ponge or Char, reflect even in their exaggeration, the reawakening of the ethical sense.

If the heritage of nihilism remains at the center of present day poetic consciousness, the poets who assume it do not allow themselves any further escape or irresponsibility. Supplementing this moralism, a new development of this decade is the disappearance, within the nihilistic stream, of that intellectual aestheticism which gave its clas-

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sical shape to the poetry of the end of the last century. In his *Faust* (1946), which is the true testament of an epoch, Paul Valéry for the last time asserts, in lines of Cornelian vigor, this refusal to participate in the world, to be reduced to the rank of a mere creature, which was dictated by his intellectual pride as well as by his lassitude in the face of existence, the *odium vitae* he had felt throughout life:

Mais mon esprit superbe a défait le désir . . .
Moi qui sus l'ange vaincre et le démon trahir
J'en sais trop pour aimer, j'en sais trop pour haïr,
Et je suis excédé d'être une créature.

The fairies, who had offered him rebirth and were rebuked, supply Faust with the last word fitting his comedy:

Ton premier mot fut NON . . .
Qui sera le dernier.

Thus falls the curtain on the adventures of this hero, symbolizing modern Western man. Marlowe's protagonist joins Valéry's *réincarnation* in the abyss of non-being. But the disdain of the Valéry aristocrat now gives way to furious attacks unleashed against a universe which has become a gigantic prison for man. Violence, disparaging irony, the burden of despair—these reactions are not new in the history of modern French poetry, as we are reminded by the example of Baudelaire, Lautréamont, Corbière, Rimbaud, Laforgue, Jarry. However, it is by its excessive tone, its radical hostility towards *all* manifestations of the given world, (poetry and language as well as nature and society), that our epoch stands out. In this Dadaistic perspective must be placed the work of liquidation undertaken by the "anti-poets," "apoets," and "lettrists" who flourished around 1945, at the apogee of Saint-Germain-des-Prés. They were eager, as Jean Tardieu put it, "to learn the very language of nothingness." Meanwhile, these wrecking poets launched an assault on the traditional "beautiful language" of poetry, in which Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Valéry took refuge during the earlier, aesthetic phase of nihilism. It spells the end of the Ivory Tower, the rejection of the various Artificial Paradises, of the illusion, still cultivated in the late '30s by a Patrice de la Tour du Pin, that there could be a "recluse life in poetry." Song, henceforth, becomes as intolerable as life itself.

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Poetry is the supreme imposture, a make-believe disguising the true meaning of all human life, which is absence of poetry, the radical impossibility of any poetry. The sincere poet of the time will do without it. Genuine poetry must turn into apoetry, anti-poetry. The "hatred of poetry" (as Georges Bataille so aptly said) will become its battlecry. "The terror in literature" had attacked during the heyday of Surrealism the value of the conventional outer world, of rational consciousness, of traditional morals, of the social structure, of any given reality. It now turns against the expressive vehicle itself, language, where it detects the very blemishes of existence with which speech makes common cause. Present-day literary terrorism has no illusions to spare about the saving grace of the poetic "logos" or of imagination, in which Rimbaud and Breton still believed. Its nihilism, like that of Jarry and of Dada, is total. It celebrates a kind of anti-paradise, in which man finds his salvation only by surrendering to *le néant*. In its final stages this tendency exalts the advent of universal death, of which it everywhere discerns the rise, and whose hegemony it no longer consents to deny, to veil or to combat. There are strange echoes of Leconte de l'Isle's "Solvet Saeclum" in the gloomy but unshapely prophecies of these most un-Parnassian moderns.[1]

This message of funereal truth breaks through the rebellious violence of Jacques Prévert. It inspires the hallucinatory spectacles Henri Michaux conjures up in order to counter the great invading darkness: "Exorcism," he writes, "a reaction in full force, like the attack of a battering-ram, is the true poem of the prisoner." It sounds through the prosaic irony of Jean Tardieu (whose first master was P. Valéry), the cataclysmic rhetoric of Audiberti, the gibes and clown's antics of Queneau. Lettrism, finally, is an extreme phenomenon, directed at once against the obsolete world of things and the fraudulent world of language.

Instead of extirpating poetry by destroying its linguistic roots as the lettrists do, it is possible to belittle it, to cast doubts upon its pseudo-magical powers through the constant use of sarcasm. In Raymond Queneau's verse, irony aims more at the suspect use of lan-

1 The real significance of the Parnassians within the whole picture of French poetry of the last hundred years remains to be brought out. It is far deeper than is usually granted, at least from the ideological point of view.

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guage in poetry than at the mores of bourgeois society, which are perhaps even less edifying. Revolt here turns against the existence and contradictory pretentions of Art (with a capital A), which insists on surviving amidst an absurd universe. A sneering poet, past master of caricatural effects and farcical mummery, Queneau raises derision to the status of religion. The god one reveres in this strange liturgy is "this lugubrious imbecile/ who will harvest me on his toothpick's tip/ when, defeated, I shall with a vague and placid eye/ have surrendered all my courage to the rodents of the present" (*Les Ziaux*). The Latin of this church is a truly extraordinary invention, made up in equal parts of mocking grandiloquence, standard faked naïveté, hallucinatory metaphors coldly concerted to ridicule this stock device of modern poetry, pedantic buffoonery, and slang. Never did the metaphysical and cosmic refusal present itself in a more rollicking manner. But under the mask of clever tricks of the *Exercices de Style,* the dry jokes and puns of *Si tu t'imagines* or *La Petite Cosmogonie Portative,* one detects more often than not the face of despair.

However, a reaction had set in during the war in favor of a restoration of the dignity of poetic language, if not of man and the world. It is noteworthy and regrettable that this attempt took place in general on two distinct planes, in separate and mutually exclusive phases. At one moment the intention was to restore respect for the inherited tongue, for its revised and concretized commonplaces, and for literary art as such, which the nihilistic revolt had put into question. This task was undertaken by Jean Paulhan, who is preoccupied with forms, conventions, problems of rhetoric. He is an acute critic of what he labeled "the terror in literature." But Paulhan carefully avoids challenging the metaphysical foundations of that "terror," the ideological premises and the sociohistorical justification of nihilism, to which modern "terroristic" poetry is heir. Thus Jean Paulhan, with his customary nimbleness, does away with the main problem, which is of an ethical and political nature. He would have the end without wanting the means.

In some other quarters, however, it is the question of restoring man, degraded by an evil social system, or by the blindness of the mechanics of nature, which is dominant. To the formal arti-

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fice of an aristocratic literature propounded by bourgeois esthetes, a poetry of direct and brutal demand is opposed. The satire of a false human order and of the fake language reflecting it is here achieved by means of a provincial or proletarian *faubourg* dialect, handled with virulence. Paradoxically, a Guillevic, a Prévert, make use of an anti-poetic idiom, and thus seem to draw close to the tendency represented by Queneau. But this slangy truculence, which in Queneau's writing translates the sneer of hopelessness, the symptom of human debasement, becomes in Prévert a weapon in the political struggle, a package of dynamite thrown into the correct *sous-préfectures* of reactionary poetry. Queneau, a middle class nihilist, denounces life itself:

Infirme est toute la nature
(*Les Ziaux*)

Neige demain sèche avant-hier
ru d'avenir coule en un puits
c'est la belle train des amours
c'est la belle train des vacances
elle mène jusqu'à la mort
qui vient après convalescence
(*L'instant fatal*)

Prévert's ferocity, in "Familiale" or the "Dîner des Têtes à Paris-France," is directed against a particular world and certain people:

La vie continue la vie avec le tricot la guerre les affaires
les affaires la guerre le tricot la guerre
Les affaires les affaires et les affaires
La vie avec le cimetière
(*Paroles*)

But he exerts it neither against *the* world nor against *men*. The resemblance with Queneau is fortuitous, involving a superficial similarity of means. Thereby Prévert parts from nihilism, although he, like Bertold Brecht, borrows from its arsenal expressive tools, arms of denial with which to bludgeon a regime from which he expects no salvation. His aim, however, is to exalt the great Sunday of the future, the utopia of happiness on earth, of which his popular love

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songs give us a foretaste. In his way, Prévert makes René Char's motto his own: "If you must annihilate, let it be with nuptial tools."

In our time the belief in salvation rests more on the acceptance of natural and human reality than on a transcendental intuition. To the tendentious anti-nihilism of extreme left-wing poetry has been added an "ontological" or "realist" anti-nihilism. This movement is not without kinship with the rhetorical thinking of Jean Paulhan, which aims at restoring our esteem for the expressive vehicle flouted by the nihilistic "terror." To this linguistic interest, however, the new trend adds a genuine deference towards the world of objects and man's existential experience. The Romantic flights towards the infinite, "the unknown good," Baudelaire's Platonizing *Elévation,* are now replaced by the quest for this nether world, or, as F. Ponge so strongly put it, this upper world, *l'Ici-Haut.* Whether such poets are Marxist revolutionaries like Ponge, traditional provincials like Jean Follain, or liberal humanists like René Char, the emphasis is on the rediscovery of the real world, on sensory awareness, and on the artist's moral responsibility towards his fellow human beings as well as the things contained in his universe.

To this is joined a care for verbal perfection, for concision and personal modesty, of which we had nearly lost the habit after almost two centuries of Romanticism. If language pretends to fulfill its part, it must rival in fullness of meaning and expressive force this dense, compact world of concrete existence. Poetry becomes the medium where the real is at last recovered and shown forth: "O endless resources of the thickness of things, rendered by the infinite resources of the semantic depth of words" (F. Ponge, *Proêmes*). We are here at the antipodes of the nihilistic ivory tower. And yet, through a paradox comparable to that which was discovered above in the relationships of Queneau and Prévert, the formal searching, the taste for the rare, the precious, the far-fetched, so conspicuous in the work of Char and Ponge, remind us irresistibly of the Parnassian jewelry, of Mallarmé's syntactical distortions, of Valéry's mannerisms, all the devices of the masters of nihilistic aestheticism. *"Et ce n'est pas ainsi que parle la nature."* There is a contradiction here between the end, which is new, and the means, largely inherited from the past, which the generation born around 1900 has not truly overcome. But these

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poets are not content to emerge with a revelation of death and nothingness. Poetic meaning is for them the sense of a reconquered life and a natural existence. "We must put things back into their rightful place," says Ponge. "Language, in particular, into its own." (*Proêmes*) Such poets are men of transition, hampered by their sophisticated heritage, half-hearted innovators; hence the stylistic ambiguity of their achievements. Yet we witness in their work a true metaphysical reversal which is also to be found in other literatures, as in Rilke (in his last period), in Machado, in W. C. Williams, and Jorge Guillén. In French poetry it is anticipated, before 1939, by St.-John Perse, Supervielle and Milosz. Goethe's phenomenological bent for the first time begins to bear fruit in the West: *Zum sehen geboren.*

Between the two contradictory formulae set forth by Rimbaud, "Real life is elsewhere" and "We can't set out," the choice of the generations who have gained poetic notoriety since the war goes to the second. Hence the orientation of not only French but possibly all of Western poetry is reversed.

On ne part pas on ne part jamais
pour ma part en île je me suis arrêté fidèle
debout comme le prêtre Jehan un peu de biais sur la mer
et sculpté au niveau du museau des vagues et de la fiente des oiseaux
choses choses c'est à vous que je donne
ma folle face de violence déchirée dans les profondeurs du tourbillon . . .

Thus speaks, in a poem published in 1954, the Negro poet Aimé Césaire, who emerges from the Surrealist group, to which René Char also belonged in his earlier years. "It is useless to start out," writes F. Ponge, "one must transfer oneself to things."

This acceptance of Ponge's *ici-haut,* this openness to things, whose part Ponge takes against a closed-in society, this risky surrender of the self to the universe or to the divine presence, echoes also among certain poets of the Christian persuasion. Rejecting the neo-Platonic tradition, St. Augustine's dualism, St. Paul's wholly tran-

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scendental orientation, they attempt to renew their alliance with the concreteness of Creation, the mystery of immanence and of divine unity within the boundaries of human experience, which illuminates the world of the Old Testament as well as certain parts of the New. This is the meaning of the forceful poetry of Jean Grosjean, a defrocked priest who started on a quest for the true Abraham, the earthly Son of Man eternally reincarnated among us. Luc Estang, while more orthodox in his theological views, begins his vast hymn to the four elements with a *Poem of the Sea.* Refusal, difference asserted as defiance, yield to a reconciling, and truly Franciscan, humility. To the fragmentation of life caused by frantic individuation, to the multiplicity which is mother of nothingness, the destructive principle from which rose the present-day Tower of Babel, Pierre Emmanuel now opposes "Simplicity, the mother of being."

For René Char, as for W. C. Williams, the mission of the poet is "through metaphor to reconcile/ the people and the stones." Char, himself a disciple of Heraclitus, puts the emphasis upon the poem, a spiritual measure regulating the relationship of man with the world, mutually restored in the act of verbal creation. The poem itself is the place where the reconciliation takes place. Through a difficult miracle of the human language, which both reveals and conceals the truth, a mediation sometimes occurs between man and the earth: they suddenly discover a forgotten brotherhood. Thus beauty will conquer "the whole place," instead of being content, as in the past, with the limited domain of art. According to this conception the poem, defined as an architecture of incarnate essences, will unite a freer self to a nature redeemed from the utilitarian exploitation which degrades and isolates men.

The ecstatic joy found in the blaze of the elements emanates from the work of Char, as well as from that of his disciples René Ménard, Jean Sénac, Armen Tarpinian. Abandoning closed individuality, they tend towards recapturing the primordial unity of love. Such a purpose, however, can be achieved only if the poet accepts total responsibility for his exacting nuptials with life. Self-imposed discipline and necessary suffering, then, must needs precede any moment of fulfilment or fruition. Char has no illusions about the somber side of existence. The proper function of beauty, precisely, is "to kindle that which must be kindled in our sheaf of darkness."

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Poetry he defines as unity in contradiction, "insurgent order." If the poet's path leads him towards the unknown, the bliss of discovery cannot be separated from the terror of otherness, the raptured glance from the waste spaces it encompasses: "After the ultimate distortion, we have reached the crest of knowledge. This is the minute of the considerable danger: the ecstasy before the void, the new ecstasy before the fresh emptiness."

Such wisdom hurts. But "lucidity is the wound which is nearest to the sun." Through the ministry of consciousness alone can life's right to newness be protected: "I love man uncertain of his ends, like the fruit-tree in April." Together with the sybilline tone, an inclination towards mannerism in the tradition of the *précieux* writers, one easily detects in Char a Cornelian strain, which sometimes degenerates into sententiousness. Poet-moralist, he advocates courage, will, steadfastness, movement: "Belong to the leap. Do not share in the banquet, its epilogue." The very boldness of our challenge shall overcome the adversity inherent in man's condition:

Car rien ne fait naufrage ou ne se plaît aux cendres;
Et qui sait voir la terre aboutir à des fruits,
Point ne l'émeut l'échec quoiqu'il ait tout perdu.

This brief but triumphant vision of harvest on earth—a gain fully paid for in human toil and tears—lifts Char's work above the despair born out of blind historical determinism, which crushed most earlier modern poets. The secret of all resistance is founded in hope: *"Résistance n'est qu'espérance."*

If Char exalts the poem, a human creation, Ponge insists upon the importance of the object in his creation. The objects described in *Le Parti Pris des Choses* under a highly stylised form, "testify," states the author himself in his *Proêmes,* "to an infallibility which is a little short." They are apparently devoid of metaphysical intentions, or even of direct relationship with man. Yet it is man that Ponge aims at reconstructing through the ministry of these objects. By manifesting the complexity and latent vitality of those things which constitute man's universe, he gives us a moral lesson. Recreating through an effort of lucid sympathy, of passionate penetration, that which to the bourgeois Philistine, the Christian ascetic, the Cartesian stoic

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and the modern nihilist alike are but vulgar lumps of matter, deprived of soul and reality, he "moralizes the landscape" in order to give back to man a significant and real world. This is the meaning of his furious involvement of consciousness in things. "Expression," writes Ponge, "is for me the only resource. The rage of expression." Against the man of today, Ponge takes the part of tomorrow's man, who will be, he assumes, at home in the universe. "It is also in order to put your nose into your dirt that I describe a million *other things* which are possible and imaginable. Why not the bathtowel, the potato, the washing-machine, the pieces of anthracite. . . . In all possible tones. In this world with which I have nothing in common, where I cannot desire anything . . . why should I not, arbitrarily, begin with etc. . . etc. . ." (*Proêmes,* 1943). Ponge, in his tension towards the real world, adopts as his poetic art this manneristic formula: "The poet must never present a thought, but an object; I mean that even to the thought he must impart the pose of an object" (*Proêmes*).

Such an excess of "reism," in spite of the hyperconsciousness of its means, and the verbal artifice it implies, finds echoes among certain gifted young poets (André du Bouchet). Elsewhere it is compensated for by a contrary trend, towards a well-intentioned and often sentimental neo-romanticism. A slight "Blue flower" quality characterises the best poets of the Ecole de Rochefort, René Guy Cadou in particular. Here anti-nihilism, allied to the exaltation of the "vegetable kingdom" (which is also the realm of earthly love and beauty), is revealed in a more naive manner. Unfortunately it often suffers from diffuseness and superficiality. It is not enough to write, as did Jean Rousselot on the title page of his last book, "There is no exile," for it to be really so. Nothing is given in advance. No exile? That would be too good to be true.

Other poets, perhaps, have better expressed the nature of this spiritual struggle, while showing how its outcome remains uncertain for the men of our time. They take a less clear-cut attitude towards the epoch's major issues. Divided between the temptation of nihilism (degenerating, besides, into a facile intellectual conformism) and the attraction towards the real which they do not yet feel themselves able to face, they undergo a severing of the sensibility. Of this breakage their poetry is largely the testimony.

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When André Frénaud wrote *Les Rois Mages* during the world war, the quest of his Magi ended, like that of Eliot's, in failure, lostness, the nostalgia of a forbidden Paradise and of a death that might recall it. And yet, in the heart of the straying, wondering Kings, there survived a pathetic impulse towards joy:

"Nous sommes perdus . . . On nous a fait de faux
rapports
c'est depuis le début du voyage
Il n'y avait pas de route il n'y a pas de lumière . . .
Mais je ne puis guérir d'un appel insensé"
(*Les Rois Mages,* 1942)

In the works of Lucien Becker, Alain Bosquet, Yves Bonnefoy, in my own poetry too, this conflict between disillusion and "a senseless call" attains its full breadth. While Robert Sabatier, a little prematurely perhaps, yields to the celebration of *Solar Festivals* (1955), Lucien Becker remains on the dividing line of the poetic domains in our period. Is it time to envisage, as Jean Cassou recently wrote, "the restoration of the reign of the Sun"? *"Qui parle de désert, d'absence?"* asks J. Charpier. *"Le monde est là."* The very fact that these questions are raised at all reveals a deep change in attitude of present-day poets towards life. They can only be answered by the act of living itself, as each one of us resolves to fulfill it in his innermost self, and to express it in words.

Lucien Becker's world is made up of lonely, separate objects, pebbles or passers-by, "who cannot share our existence." Isolated by the surrounding void and the inner nothingness of consciousness, men and things as targets of perception seem stuck to the surface like "collages" of reality. The fragile canvas is always on the verge of tearing. The objects are "the witness of a world without depth." Only the return of the desired woman restores it intermittently to its true dimensions. In such instants which alone are real amidst a universe condemned to endless eclipses, and which constitute Becker's major source of inspiration, objects reconquer their absolute, that is to say, their humanized meaning. They take their fill of reality in spite of the threatening vacuum. The moment of carnal contact or of erotic vision thus stands in the center of Becker's reconstruction of the world as well as of his poetic creation. Voluptu-

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ousness alone is interposed between man and the abyss. The certainty of its renewal renders the passing of time bearable. Since Eluard's death, Becker is the most original erotic poet of the decade. His cult of love is of a metaphysical as well as sensuous nature. In carnal intensity itself there resides for him a supernatural power, through the medium of which poet and world are again welded together, in the flash of a single moment. In Becker's poetry love has not only, as for almost all other poets descending from nihilism, the power of masking man's atrocious destiny, of throwing a temporary disguise over the ever-resurging void. Eros alone transmutes into a poem the hopeless prose of life in the daily hell of cities. "The sky possesses its real hue / only above your head." Becker's poems are written in monochord quatrains. They have a subdued sonority, and reveal a glimmer of suppressed imagery like that of embers smoldering under ashes. The ambivalent attitude of the poet towards the existence which inspired them is also reflected in his awkward rhythm, constantly turning against itself, in uneven, irregularly rhymed meters, each one suggesting an impulse arrested at its very start.

Alain Bosquet's poetic position is founded upon a perpetual paradox. "Why write?" Bosquet asks himself in *Le Défi du Cristal,* an unpublished text dated 1952.

> Because tomorrow at dawn we shall all be pulverised. Unable to save anything whatsoever, unanxious to save anything, already crossed out of time, swallowed up by space, I at least throw this challenge at myself: to write a few lines which translate the serenity, the humanism, the tolerance of which neither my skin nor my blood is still capable. . . . He who speaks of prestige speaks of responsibility. . . . I want my poetry to be dense, difficult, revised, postponed until tomorrow: form —i.e. the trouble I took to write, to hesitate, to erase, to modify—constitutes the safest defense I could oppose to a murderous today. . . . Poetry: a faith which feeds on analyses. Poetry: a scepticism which does not accept the far too easy solution consisting in the denial of all solutions. Poetry: a ruthless discipline imposed on the most complete chaos. . . . Perfection, you are my guillotine, and you save me. . . . To be total, such is the law which replaces the former password: to be new.

In my own poetry too, the polarities previously described are clearly visible. My first book, *La Lutte avec l'Ange* (1950), was written under the shadow of the Second World War, between 1939

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and 1948, partly in France and partly in America. In spite of its depressed, tense atmosphere, its clutter of cryptic images, its formal rigidity, its constant recoiling into attitudes of immobile waiting, its stubborn refusal of proffered existence, one may already detect here and there attempts at a breakthrough in the direction of terrestrial daylight, surges towards inconceivable joy and resurrection at the very depth of loneliness, anguish, real exile and winter:

Mes cris d'enfant montent comme des fûts
par la forêt de mes nocturnes salles
où s'arme un jour issu de mon refus.

The present is but agony, but from it a new splendid day will emerge. This contradictory begetting of joy in agony (not unlike the duality of the poets discussed above) seems to be the characteristic trait of my own sensibility, and the main theme of my work. Such a strange capacity for reversal *in extremis* produces, in the most hopeless hours, a sense of absolute invulnerability. Sometimes, in periods of greatest inner upheaval and fragmentation, these two unreconcilable components of my ground-feeling towards life have revealed themselves in separation. Usually, however, they manifest themselves in simultaneity, through a spiralling movement, a kind of dialectical relationship. Issuing from one another, they then resolve themselves into a brief synthesis which is at once agony *and* exultation, violence and appeasement, struggle and surrender. This revealing conflict can be sensed even in the style. It often presents an alternation of tight, nervous, strongly rhythmical formulae, accumulated images bursting like hand-grenades,

L'arbre est explosion du roc vers la lumière

with murmuring elegiac modulations and avowal of human warmth: *"Toute ma force est faite / de tendresse secrète."* In this endless counterpoint of living and failing, exile and earthly rootedness, alienation and love, the conflicting inner forces of man find their shifting balance and their approximate expression. The critic E. Noulet, quite rightly, sees in *La Corne du Grand Pardon* (1955) "the contrary of a book of lamentations. It is a book of remission: the sufferings have borne fruit, and the harvest is prepared." This remission, however, is achieved throught the medium of a voice rising out of a

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darkness which is starkly presented, and faced with open eyes. First must come the full awareness of the exile's bleak inheritance. His fingers must explore in depth the old wound of a life spent in waiting:

> *Ce que l'homme a perdu, c'est le monde lui-même,*
> *il survit au milieu d'une absence de monde*
> *pour sculpter le visage aveugle de la nuit.*
> *Il n'y a plus de monde, et pourtant nous vivons,*
> *nous marchons, nous parlons, comme s'il était proche,*
> *lui qui s'est esquivé. Silence. Plus de monde.*
>
> (*Le Doigt dans la Plaie*)

L'attente, waiting, represents that still but crucial middle point, the mediating agent between the absence we are heir to and the loving presence of the world towards which the spirit still strives. That bliss is really here, if one could only grasp it, by holding out, by straining and yet keeping quiet during the journey through the void, —by waiting. To wait is to die without dying, to commit a slow hara-kiri of all past expectations. For the self which has given up its previous demands for an immediate life, to wait means to open up, to ripen (like an autumnal fruit), to change into *another.* Such a conscious vigil must be relentlessly pursued at the heart's midplace, between Yes and No, between rootedness and exile from being. Waiting in the midst of nothing is neither easy nor futile. It means to hold this nothing in check, not to succumb to it, not to become its tool or advocate. Therefore, such active waiting can procure victory over exile. This is the significance of the struggle of Jacob with the Angel throughout the night at Phanuel near the river Jabbock. For to vanquish this angel of the night, this aggression of a murderous inner and outer absence, is to turn it (and oneself through it) into the reality of the hidden world. For the lonely Jacob, who "remained there that night," it is the sole means of securing the blessing, of gaining a foothold on the promised land, of reaching towards the future, history, the children beyond the river. *"The tree of life,"* concludes the critic quoted above, "is not the tree of good and evil, but the tree of the only science worth knowing, the science necessary to survive, to endure and surmount, to draw from hostile fate an even greater harvest of days:

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Jacob à Phanuel,
qu'apprit-il?
à mourir pour ne pas mourir
il apprit à ne pas appartenir
à fonder son matin sur sa perte en ce monde,
à boiter pour la vie.

It is in this sense that René Char writes about the poet in our civilization: "He knows how to shape his health out of misfortune" (*A une Sérénité Crispée*).

Like Char and F. Ponge, the contemporary French poets who are most deeply marked by the aesthetic heritage of the late 19th century and committed to formal perfection, put their enthusiasm at the service of another cause than that of M. Teste or Hérodiade. Thus St.-John Perse, whose influence is visible on J. Charpier, E. Glissant, P. Oster, continues to celebrate, in his great poems published since the war, the tragic splendor of a universe and of an historical adventure which includes all peoples, in which individual man, and the poet himself in his subjective aspect, hold little place. This is the end of solitary Romantic pessimism. Everything here becomes Type and Species. World and history are the protagonists in this epic which sounds the advent of a new empire of man, heralding the "great works of Reason."

If Perse's rhetorical magnificence draws, beyond Paul Claudel, Rimbaud and Lautréamont, on the sources of classical eloquence, it is rather of the rigor and sober perfection of the Mallarmé tradition that we are reminded by the poetry of Yves Bonnefoy. But he does not suffer from the defect which is common in the last century's symbolistic school: he avoids logolatry—the cult of language-in-itself, and "pure poetry." While he actualizes its powers, he also recognizes with courageous lucidity the limits of the poetic language, threatened by death and obliteration. Like the flame which knows itself only in its reversion, the power of speech is condemned to disappear in the very moment when it asserts itself. It never has access to being. It is a tension, a pure élan, and certain only—like human consciousness itself—to perish in his movement towards unrealizable permanency:

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Je ne suis que parole intentée à l'absence,
L'absence détruira tout mon ressassement.
Oui, c'est bientôt périr de n'être que parole,
Et c'est tâche fatale et vain couronnement.

For the metaphysical pride of the Mallarméan tradition, for the haughty and sterile refusal of Hérodiade or M. Teste, Yves Bonnefoy substitutes the existential drama itself: a humbler subject perhaps, but is there a more compelling theme than that of human consciousness straining in anguish towards the real in a movement born from its innermost sources, and falling back again, like poetry itself, which is its verbal mirror, into the darkness of absence? Bonnefoy's poems all witness this clash of consciousness with the ever imminent instant of its death. The aim of this spiritual search, and of this poetry, is nothing less than the inner taming of the night, the continual apprenticeship to dying as the crucial experience of the life of consciousness, and by extension, of the poetic life. This is what the Hegelian epigraph of the book expresses: "The life of the spirit, however, is not afraid in the face of death, and does not withdraw from it. It is the life which endures it and maintains itself in it." We are far here from the Ivory Tower, from the surrealist *divertissement* in the depths of the unconscious, far also from the Byzantium of Yeats, or from Valéry's spiteful Faust who felt "weary of being a creature." Up to now Bonnefoy's work has ended with an anguished and ambiguous questioning, containing hope, a challenge, and an apprehension of defeat:

Le jour franchit le soir, il gagnera
Sur la nuit quotidienne.
O notre force et notre gloire, pourrez-vous
Trouer la muraille des morts?

Thus speaks, in our generation, the voice of a responsible poetry.

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Steven Marcus

IN APPREHENSION HOW LIKE A GOD

In our regiment we found a surprising number of "basics" and "intermediates." These were, respectively, men who had not completed the fourth grade or the seventh grade, or who in the Army's judgment had not attained the equivalent of that degree of education.

We made this discovery in the course of a survey required by our Army headquarters. Periodically the Army undertakes a numerical accounting, in general categories, of the educational acquirements of its personnel, and in each unit the Information and Education Section, of which I was a member, is responsible for this report.

The motives behind these surveys are never quite perceptible, especially since it's plain enough that the Army does not collect statistics in the interests of general knowledge. They are probably relevant, however, to those occasional manifestations of snobbery, referred to as "economy", that characterize the service, in which a directive or circular is "promulgated" ordering the compulsory release from active duty of all men who fall below a certain dismal competence of learning. These directives are so forested with qualifications and exceptions that they rarely serve to bring about the winnowing effect they seem to intend. In another way, though, they do make their mark: they normally send the Regular Army men into a panic. Information and Education offices are besieged with queries and shouts for help from those who suspect that their livelihoods are in jeopardy and who want to learn the quickest and most efficacious way of disqualifying themselves from the provisions of the most recent circular. In most cases, I was grateful to find, there is a way out.

We also discovered that a large number of our permanent per-

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sonnel—we were a training outfit—had no high school education. For men in this category the Army administers a test called the GED or General Educational Development Test which, if passed, entitles such persons to claim the equivalent of a high school diploma; personnel are encouraged to take the test. Actually, the examination demands something like ninth grade performance, but, as in so many other things in the Army, allowances have to be made for the standard of the material at hand, and for the altruistic aims, not the least of which is to promote self-esteem, that are necessarily involved. The examination consists mainly of questions about a paragraph of prose which the examinee must read, a smattering of English grammar, and the rudiments of arithmetic. Yet it is a test, and it exists within that penumbra of mystery and heroics which surrounds all examinations, even those taken by the educated.

To a Regular Army soldier a high school education often appears to be the key to all those doors which open upon the world of glamor and influence and well-being. Possession of it would somehow bring him closer to qualifying for Officers Candidate School, the Oxford of the uncommissioned. It would be an insurance policy taken against that fateful though anticipated day when he must leave the service: it would, he thinks, enhance his opportunities in the "world of business." Then too, of course, it is an emblem of personal accomplishment, the *primum bonum* of the deprived. The fact of his having passed such a test will be duly entered on his Enlisted Qualification Record, and his status as a non-commissioned officer and a career soldier, especially in a time of peace, will prosper.

The Officer in Charge of our section thought it would help matters if we offered a series of preparatory sessions for cadre wanting to take the test, and at one of the weekly Troop Information Hours he announced a course of off-duty hour classes which would prepare men for the examination in English and Arithmetic. Anyone interested could enroll, and classes would commence the following week. I was assigned to teach the course in English.

To prepare for this assignment I procured a number of exercise books which the Army publishes and prepared a set of eight two-hour sessions which included the fundamentals of grammar and a certain amount of practice in reading. We also had some trainees sent on detail to clean our large classroom and wax the floors, and

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we made arrangements with the various Company Commanders to excuse any of their cadre who attended the classes from night duty in the field or in the company areas. Cooperation throughout the regiment was excellent, the Army, like the nation, honoring the exertions of scholarship, even such a scholarship as this.

One evening in June, everything was ready. After supper, I went to my barracks, washed, and changed into civilian clothes—slacks, a light shirt, and an old green corduroy jacket that I had worn through years of graduate school. I walked slowly across to our building, ruminating pleasantly about teaching once more, and entertaining with some equally pleasant idleness a familiar academic illusion: perhaps *this* kind of teaching would be more satisfying, would have more material results, than the kind I was accustomed to. I became innervated by the coolness of the evening air. The dust stirred up by the drilling troops had settled back into the light dew, and a barely perceptible odor of new-cut grass mingled with the habitual, suffusive redolence of grease-traps and garbage cans. In its own way, and for only a few hours, the Army was going to be a campus.

Having unlocked the door and surveyed our sparkling-shabby classroom, its glimmering floor and freshly spattered walls, its rows of battered chairs aligned with military rectitude, I sat down to wait. Within half an hour eight men arrived. These eight were all that ever came, and they all stayed to the end of the course. I initiated them with a brief introduction to the aims of the class, had them write a one-page essay about nothing, gave them an assignment from the text for the next week, and dismissed them.

I had thought to dissipate the military atmosphere by coming in civilian dress. I had considered that a certain informality would be beneficial, and had hoped to put these expectably shy sergeants at their ease in a classroom. I felt that in uniform my Pfc stripes might too pointedly recall them to the ignominy of their illiterateness. It was but a few months since they had been running me ragged day and night, trying, in eight brief weeks, and by the most violent methods allowed them, to initiate me into their military "arts" and habits. Yet all the resentment and contempt that still rankled in my soul for the veteran soldiers who had trained me were modulated when I saw their representatives that first evening.

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They were as children come to the Thanksgiving or Christmas party at school: they had dressed for the occasion.

It was to all appearances a momentous one. Some of them had put on clean fatigues, heavily starched and pressed, and a couple of them had the trouser creases sewn in. They were tailored, as usual, and fit with that peculiar rounding tightness that in the Army is held to be the type of soldierly style. Their red helmet liners gleamed, and when they laid them on the arms of the student chairs they made the sharp, hollow scraping that became for me a kind of analogue to the murmur of conversation that preceded lectures at a university. The others had worn fresh khakis, starched into poreless armor, and their breasts were dotted with the ribbons they had earned by time-serving or valor. The combat boots of all of them had been polished assiduously and were worn with bloused trousers; they seemed tacitly to agree that since this class, though it assembled during off-duty hours, was a kind of quasi-military function, the shibboleth of the field, the combat boot, should unite them and bear them up. During the next eight weeks they persisted in this supererogatory costume, finding, I believe, that their soldierly address helped assuage the embarrassment of their ignorance. The starch held them together when they fumbled for nouns and adjectives. The helmet liners retained their plastic firmness while the meaning of words vanished as in water. The ribbons pressed their fealty and courage and endurance to their breasts even as they faltered over passages of the most elementary English. Sitting before me like small boys they could not afford a moment's lapse in their existence as men at arms. Grossly, yet without preconception, and while involved in the most unsoldierly practices, they insisted upon their official identity.

My eight students made a striking crew. Two of them were Negroes from the South. Three were "imports": one a Puerto Rican, another a Hawaiian, the other a Chilean. One came from the back-hills of Pennsylvania and another from the back-hills of California. The eighth man claimed to have been raised in Tampa, Florida. Yet they were, with the exception of this last man, a remarkably homogeneous group, united by something more than their profession. One of the first things I experienced was a genuine difficulty in understanding what they said. They spoke with the most remarkable

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accents, and I found that I had as much trouble in making out what the Negroes or the Sergeant First Class from California said as I did in penetrating the accents of those of my students whose English had been acquired secondarily. This was all the more remarkable since it quite contradicted the clarity of speech and voice I knew they commanded in the field. To be sure, the orders they issued there were circumscribed and formal, though I had heard all of them at one time or another speak with admirable distinctness to a company of troops, giving relatively elaborate instructions simply and pointedly. But when I asked them to read a sentence such as "The men followed the path around the barn and into the forest," a most original series of renditions were likely to come forth. The Negroes invariably read "The mens. . . ." I could count on hearing, "The men flowed around the barn. . . ." from someone, and I was always prepared for "The men followed the path around the forest and into the barn." To them the simplest printed words were as the bull on a target five hundred yards away is to a trainee; the dim black markings would waver and swing, elongate and disappear, and the students' voices would droop and quiver and suddenly ascend with stress and fatigue, just as the rifle of the untrained marksman, because of the flabbiness of his muscles and the spasmic cramping induced by the contortions of the standard aiming positions, moves erratically about the target. They would grasp their books as if they were likely to scuttle away, expending uncommon effort to bring the words a few yards closer. Sometimes they tried to extort the books themselves of the information they seemed so reluctant to yield, and each session was orchestrated by the audible and furious wrenching of bindings, creasing of pages, underlining of words that meant nothing, and general activity upon the form and body of the page, as if the discharge of physical energy upon an object were itself a guarantee of memory and comprehension.

Nevertheless, the differences among them were soon apparent. The Chilean was easily the star of the class. The examination would confront him with no difficulties, nor did he really need this course. Small and scrawny, with grizzled skin and wiry limbs, he seemed, like so many Regular Army men, about fifteen years older than he was. He had completed high school in his native country, and when I asked him why he hadn't obtained the necessary documents to

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establish this fact, he shrugged, replied that he might do just that, and continued with the course. Within three weeks it was clear that only he and perhaps one other—the rustic from Pennsylvania—had the faintest hope of passing. The others were out of the picture, unregenerate, either because they had never been blessed with the ability to learn, or because something blocking and suppressing their faculties of memory and reason had been done to them. These I would hammer points into one by one, offering illustration after illustration of a single principle, until at last they would grasp it, and smiles would blossom across the room. But they could learn an isolate rule or axiom of the language only by loosing their grip on all that had come before. They were like those comedians in the silent movies at whom a number of things are tossed in quick succession, and who invariably drop the precious object they have hold of in order to catch the one just launched. The classroom vibrated as if to the silent shatter of glass, each previously fragile principle bursting all unheeded into splinters as the most immediately won crystal of universal knowledge was received, fondled and inspected, circumnavigated and charted, and then grappled, finally and fatally, to their minds.

Of the foredoomed six, five seemed about equally feeble—their learning was so laborious that it would have taken about two years of these sessions to prepare them merely to read the examination. The other one was in a class of his own. He was the man who gave Tampa as his place of origin. Although his records indicated that he had finished the eighth grade it seemed unlikely to me that this was true—he could hardly have made it, especially, perhaps, in the days when he went to school: at 38 he was the oldest man in the class. His mind was impervious to the knowledge which can be conveyed to us from the written page. It was unable to perform that labor of perception by which we import the external and inanimate into our vital dominions. Whenever I asked him to read one of the sentences in the exercise-book he would sit torpidly, waiting apparently for the sentence to be generated spontaneously, like those balloons that float, effortless as a blimp, from the mouth of a comic-strip character. Occasionally he would emit a subdued grunt, as if the sentence were stirring somewhere inside him. Then he would shift on his ponderous haunches, cracking, un-

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der the weight of his concentrated muteness, the pegged and glued joints of the inadequate student chair. Perhaps two minutes would pass this way while he glared at the immobile page; at last he would gasp, clear his throat, mutter "Uh. . . ." or "The. . . ." and then collapse once more into impenetrable vacancy. When he was not called upon and others were answering questions, he would accompany their recitations with a volley of noise—grunts, groans, whistles of assent or wonder, coughs of refined disapprobation or sighs of simple envy. He was chorus to the melodrama of scholarship that was played each week upon the boards of the I & E Section. Sometimes he would wait for me to correct someone in an obvious blunder and then chortle with satisfaction at having been a party to the correction. Frequently when I would ask what was wrong with an answer one of them had just given, his arm would rocket up in a waggle of joy. I would nod to him, he would open his mouth, shut it, hack in his throat, and start up that rhythmic wheeze of exhaustion which invariably accompanied whatever mental process it was in him that so strongly suggested respiration. We all would wait, then I would call on someone else, and as soon as the answer was achieved he would vent an exclamation of delight—it was just what he had wanted to say all along. He never seemed to resent my turning to someone else and leaving him with the answer dangling and all but expressed there on the very membranes of his lips.

However, he was not stupid. Indeed when I saw him the first night I fancied that he might be one of the better students. His name was Niederweg, and he was the field first sergeant of one of the companies in the Third Battalion. I knew him from his work in the regiment and from conversations I had had with him in the course of my daily duties. In his public and professional image he seemed quite another person. He was oppressively articulate in dealing with the trainees, and no one else in the regiment could degrade and bully and cow the new troops with comparable results. In matters of profanity he was matchless, and I was once privileged to witness him exhort a company, several of whose members had had the temerity to fall asleep during a particularly boring lecture about the Geneva Convention which I was obliged to be giving them. Sgt. Niederweg interrupted my drone, stood the troops at attention and chewed at them for about five minutes without pause; he then pro-

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ceeded to enlist God, anti-Communism, modern education, what's-become-of-the-Army, World War II, last night's meal, and that evening's problem in platoon-attack in his cause, and concluded with an obscenity-studded panegyric of me, the I & E program generally, and the commanding general of the post. Although I had long since ceased to understand anything about his peroration other than that it seemed to express a kind of dizzying and insensible veneration, I advanced bravely when he had finished, sat the trainees down once again and admonished them to heed what the Sergeant had said: he was a combat-toughened veteran and knew whereof he spoke. Stunned and wearied by Niederweg's castigation, they submitted to my reprimand without a murmur.

Niederweg was one of the most opinionated people I have ever known. Without provocation he would sometimes confront me with a roster of his beliefs about life and death, the Communists, the Chinese, and the C-rations. He held convictions in every area of human experience and seemed prepared to lay down his life in rabid defense of the most trivial of them. Even so, he was not excessively brutal, as training sergeants go, and he commanded a frightened respect from his troops by means of the force of his self-assertion and the myriad stories about his experiences in combat which had attained full currency in the regiment. Butcher of the language that he was, he possessed in full measure the proprietory eloquence of his profession. It came then as something of a shock to find him so stricken in class. I never said anything to him about it—I was, perhaps, too uncertain of his reply.

When I learned that only two of my students had any chance of passing I didn't quite know what to do. I could inform the other six privately or in a body that there wasn't much point in their going on with these lessons, since the time alloted to preparing for the examination was much too brief for them to acquire the requisite knowledge. Or I could say nothing, continue with the classes, let them all take the examination without a caution from me, and allow them my judgment only if it were requested. The first course recommended itself because their exertions were so strenuous. It seemed unscrupulous indeed to let them go on with a futile study and not even warn them of certain failure. Each week they persisted in staggering through another chapter of lessons, each week they managed

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to come to another class, made their success seem that much less problematic. They were like many students in this fancy, convinced that the mere attendance at class and the simple fact of carrying a book around contained a virtue of success. And they were not far wrong; in their attempt to surmount the barricade of their illiterateness they were exercising a particular passion, and their books and attendance at class were embodiments of that passion. It would be difficult to discourage the foredoomed attempt without discouraging the passion itself. The distinction was too delicate, too fine, for me to trust them with. If I discouraged them from taking the test they were likely to infer that I was disparaging their ambition, even their characters. On the other hand was I going to let them go like sheep to a slaughter, like trainees into combat? I was their cadre, so to speak, and it was strictly incumbent on me not to let them out of training until they qualified. Such reflections would never have occurred to me had not all of them taken their lessons and the prospects of the GED certificate with the most disconcerting seriousness. In part this was my fault, for unwittingly I had brought to this class the same weight of seriousness that I had brought to my teaching in civilian life, and I had accommodated these soldiers and their difficulties with the tones of interest and consideration that had seemed to help in overcoming the difficulties of my former students. They had responded with avid and innocent good will to this treatment. It brought forth from them an acuteness of yearning, a vanity of youthful ambition they had hitherto been unable to indulge. I was their well-intentioned Svengali, but unlike him had kept no ambition to share with them.

I chose to say nothing. I reasoned that after all it was their burden, for I had not solicited their attendance nor did I plead with them to take the test. I could not hold myself accountable for their credulousness or for their exaggerated expectations. Nor could they be entirely unaware of my presentiments and hesitations. So each week the farce went on. They chose not to ask me whether or not I believed they would pass the test. Instead, at the end of each session they would stand about and assert within earshot that, judging from what they were learning each week, they stood a pretty fair chance of passing. I refrained from contradicting them since they would not directly address me. If they were afraid to find out my

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notion of the odds that was their problem. Despite the recriminations I dealt myself I could not find the compassion in my heart to hurt them in the cause of honor. I abhorred what they represented, had had too recent experience of their callousness and barbarity to feel that I should make the wounding and loving gesture of telling them the truth. I was not sorry to feel this way.

The evening of the sixth session I kept my students late. After the last of them had driven off it was too late to go to the movies, so I decided to have some beer. The post was stifling in the aridity and dust that drifted across its shriveled, sterile bosom. At the barracks, I chivvied one of the Personnel clerks into coming along, and we drove the four miles to Willie's, a tiny bar, always either deserted or overcrowded, in Brown's Mills, one of the pitiful excuses for human settlements that surround Fort Dix. Willie's air conditioning had broken down, the bar was mobbed, and we made our way inch by inch until we reached one of the ends of the horseshoe counter. There we found ourselves directly beneath the television set on which the Dodgers and Phillies were contending with each other and with Willie's huge juke-box, an electric rifle machine, a mechanical shuffleboard, with bongs and gongs and the clatter of tin score-plates, and the usual din of barroom conversation. Popping with sweat, I took off my jacket and put it between my knees.

We had just managed to order some beer when I noticed Sgt. Niederweg standing on my right. We exchanged greetings for the second time that evening, and I turned to my beer and the Dodgers, swallowed the first glass too rapidly and squinted at the blurred screen suspended directly above my head. As I put down my glass the sergeant heaved his pear-shaped, pendulous frame against me and, in the phrase memorialized by generations of the lonely or desperate or bereaved, said, "Have one on me." I did, and then another. I gave up trying to watch the ball game and peered across the bar at nothing. There was an empty phone booth to one side and I idly weighed the distracting value of calling my wife. I was about to do so when Niederweg touched my elbow and said, "How d'ya think I'm gonna do on it?"

"Why ask me now?"

"I dunno. Well . . . ya know . . . it's only two more weeks now. I mean, I've been learning a lot, and do ya think I got much of a chance?"

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"What do you think?"

"That's it. I don't know. You can see, I've been improving. I know most of the answers now, don't I? I mean I'll do better than them niggers anyway. But do you think I'll pass?"

"Is it so important to you?"

"Yeah, it really is."

"Why?"

"It just is."

"It really shouldn't be, you know. After all, you're a career man, with almost twenty years. You'll probably stick it out for thirty. And then . . . well, you'll almost surely make Master by then, and with retirement pay of seventy-five per cent you won't have much to worry about. I don't think you ought to be so worried about this."

"Look, don't fuck around with me. Am I going to make it or not?"

"I don't think so."

"Why not?"

I looked up at the television set. A relief pitcher was walking in from the bull-pen in left field. I lit a cigarette and took another swallow of beer. I began to feel ashamed of being honest with him, and embarrassed enough to fear that I was going to be hurt by the truth more than he.

"In the first place," I began, "you shouldn't expect so much in such a short time. You've only been studying for six weeks and it's obvious that you don't have enough time off to prepare the lessons decently. Besides, this is something you're not accustomed to. It's the first time in your life that you ever tried to do something like this. If you could put it off for a while and study on your own until you had mastered the book, then I think you'd have a much better chance."

"Look, you know that none of us studies on our own. If I don't pass that test now I can't go on by myself. That's why I want to pass it, ya see?"

I didn't see, nor did he. He had turned his back to the bar and was leaning against it looking at the near wall. He lifted his glass of beer, and I noticed a speckle of blue in the joint of his elbow. I looked more closely as he unbent his arm. It was writing, but it was upside down, and I couldn't read it.

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"What's that you've got tattooed there?"

"Oh, it's something I got in Seattle."

He turned and extended his right arm. There, running up it to the elbow joint, was written in indistinct, hair-sprouting gothic print, *Sic*. Above the elbow, running into his biceps, was *Transit*. I leaned across him and took his left arm. The remaining two words ran down it: *Gloria Mundi*.

"Is that the only tattoo you have?"

"That's right."

"Do you know what it means? I mean how did you happen to get that tattooed on you?"

"It's in Italian, and it means 'The shit hit the fan.' Pretty good, huh!"

I considered the novel translation a second. "Well, not exactly."

"What d'ya mean? Don't it mean 'The shit hit the fan'?"

"I suppose it does . . . in a way. I'm sorry . . . Yes, I suppose it really does, now that I think of it."

And so I could not take advantage even of the perfect and coincidental exemplum that revealed itself to me from the surfaces of Sgt. Niederweg's manly arms. Had Greatheart spent his time teaching the Christian family how to pick mushrooms he could not have felt more inane or wasted. It was impossible to go on talking with him like this, so I decided to say nothing more.

"Look," he pressed on, "I think I've got a chance to pass. You know how they are in the Army. I might just go up there that night and guess all the right answers too. It's happened before. Anyway, I've learned something. It was worth it. And I can do all the mathematics too. Who do you think'll pass?"

"I don't know."

"Well, maybe I'll make it."

For a moment I thought he must be out of his mind. No one could have command of his wits and believe what he believed. Like many madmen he looked past reality into that other world where aspiration has become assured fact—whatever he could not persuade, whatever resisted him, he ceased to regard. But even so, there was that in him which would betray, even to himself, his pretense; even his inordinate will could not coerce his mind out of its narrow, shaming orbit; even the scandalous oddities of Army testing were not

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going to defy the laws of nature. He was not mad, but that, unfortunately, didn't make much difference.

In the weeks that followed I recalled all the stories I had heard about him since I had come into the regiment. Although his home of record was Tampa he had certainly not been raised there: his speech was indigenous to the North and to the City. He was unmarried and claimed no dependents. His Emergency Data Card indicated that the Salvation Army of Tampa should be notified in case of his death, and he had made Boys' Town the sole beneficiary of his ten thousand dollars free insurance. In World War II—which was as far back as I could trace his records—he had served in Patton's Third Army, being a part of that right arm which swung through Brittany, where he was attached to a Quartermaster outfit in Brest. Subsequently he had been assigned to the occupation forces in Japan, where he returned to the work that he had given as his principal civilian occupation—longshoreman. He was rotated to the States in 1947 and eighteen months later was shipped back to Japan where he was stationed at the outbreak of the Korean war.

At this point his history burgeoned into a mythology, for he had been captured by the Chinese shortly after they crossed the Yalu River and came barreling down the peninsula, rolling up our dispersed forces before them. It was told that he had gathered his team of loaders at Inchon, stolen the weapons from a rifle platoon, and, followed by a mob of dockers, set off at a dead run for the interior and the Chinese. Another redaction had it—and I was surprised to discover how generally this fable had been circulated—that he and his men had been secretly transported to the Yalu to supervise the loading and unloading of the vessels that were to cross that river when we invaded Manchuria. I finally learned what seemed to be the truth of the matter from someone who had been in the same prison camp with him: Niederweg had been captured by the Chinese while driving a truck parallel to the front. Because of the shortage of personnel immediately following the Chinese attack, he and his longshoremen had occasionally been detailed to transport the material they had just unshipped. On one of these missions he had run into an enemy patrol behind our lines. They had shot out the tires on his truck, and he had surrendered.

He had not escaped from prison camp and was exchanged in

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the normal way. The most singular myth about him, however, had to do with his "decision" to refuse the additional daily pay that was awarded upon application to all prisoners of war. The story went that he had written to the Adjutant General declaring as his reason for not taking the stipend that he wasn't a soldier because of the money in it, and that he was sufficiently grateful for being alive and home. What probably happened, I conjectured after some private snooping about, was that he had simply never gotten around to applying for it. He had, I supposed, his own reasons for not collecting, but they were not likely to be the fantastic one held in such regard by the regiment at large.

There was little of the mysterious or distinguished in his life, I found. There were gaps in it that one could not readily bridge, but that is the usual way with soldiers: their lives are even less eventful than the lives of ordinary people; great stretches of time elapse without anything at all happening to them. Nomads by virtue of their occupation, most of them never appropriate for themselves those simple proofs of material and historical existence that articulate the skeleton of life and grace it with a coherence and substance it does not naturally possess. Pressed into uniformity by the raw tedium of his routine, the soldier is disinclined to risk too sizable an investment in those decorations or excrescences of individuality which are neither portable nor readily sloughed off. Niederweg was no exception.

After struggling through the remaining two sessions, my eight pupils went separately to the Post Education Center and took the examination. The papers had to be sent to Madison, Wisconsin, to be graded, and no results would be forthcoming for at least two weeks. Except for Niederweg I never learned how any of them made out, for I had been alerted for shipment overseas, and my activity and interest had been turned to other things.

I saw Niederweg for the last time just before I shipped out. The replacement company to which I had been assigned happened to be adjacent to my old regiment, and so in the evenings, as a "casual," I returned to my former barracks to pass the time with my companions of the last eight months. Two nights before I was transferred to McGuire Air Force Base to board a flight, a few of us drove to Willie's for some beer, and there I met Niederweg once more. This time the bar was nearly empty and very quiet. Niederweg

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was wedged in a booth at the rear of a recently opened back room, beneath a hideous, illuminated painting-on-glass of Niagara Falls. I hailed him, went over to his table and sat down across from him. We exchanged greetings, and I told him that I had been levied for overseas; he had heard about it already and wished me good luck.

"Did you ever get the results of that exam?" I asked.

"Yeah."

"How did you do?"

"I failed." Distress still fluttered above his growl, though he must have known the results for over two weeks. He studied the depths of his beer glass, and I guessed he might be very slightly drunk, though it is always hard to tell with someone like him.

"Ya know, I don't know why I took that test. What the hell, I was screwed anyway. I mean, ya know the Army, they don't ever do nothing right. Ya need a college education to pass that test. I couldn't answer none of them questions. That's what pisses me off. How do they expect ya to pass that test if ya never had an education anyway? All this build-up and cock-and-bull, and then ya get a kick in the ass."

"That's not true," I said. "You know you weren't prepared for that exam. Even if it were easier you might not have passed it. You're blaming the Army for something it's not guilty of. You know, I hate the Army more than you ever will, but that doesn't mean it purposely made you flunk or gave you an especially hard test. As a matter of fact all the copies I've ever seen are quite simple. If you'd been able to prepare yourself thoroughly you might have seen that too.

"Besides," I went on, "I don't see why the test was so damned important to you. I don't mean to be rude, but it doesn't make sense that someone like you, with your own kind of experience, should be interested in a high school diploma. Look at it this way: you're actually past the age where you could do anything with it; you're not going to go to college or anything like that, and it's not as if you were going to get out of the Army right away and go into business or some kind of work where you would be asked for proof of an education."

"Did I say I was? Why do you have to have that kind of reason to want to take that test? Look, kid, I'm a soldier, and I

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ain't going nowhere, but that don't mean I shouldn't try to better myself."

I paused, then plunged on. "Look—remember the last time I saw you here when you showed me that tattoo? I don't know how you got it, but it doesn't really mean what you think—or anyway, it means something else too. You know what that tattoo means? It means that the glories of the world all pass away, that the ambition we all have to do great things is doomed to disillusionment, that even what we do attain is bound to disappear, just like we must someday; it means that ambitions that seem so important to us—you know, like Hitler's, or wanting to have a million dollars, or to go to bed with all the beautiful women in the world, or even sometimes getting a high school education—aren't permanent, finally, and perhaps aren't even so important either."

"What d'ya mean, not important? What else is important?"

"I don't know, exactly . . . but when you think how easily any of us can disappear in the Army, or how soon all of us are going to die anyway, then my college education, and your failure on that test, and all sorts of other things so important to us that we become wretched and furious over them, don't seem so terribly tragic and crucial anymore."

"Don't it mean that the shit really did hit the fan then? Isn't that what you're telling me? Ain't that what it means, when you talk like this? It's just like the Army again—everything is all set, everybody's worked their ass off, everybody's waiting for something to happen, and then the shit hits the fan. Ain't that what you're telling me about this test and everything?"

"Maybe . . . but I still think it means that it's not so dreadfully important, and not right, to brood about things like this. They shouldn't mean that much."

For a few moments we sat in silence. I knew I hadn't convinced him. I hadn't even convinced myself, but at least, I thought, I had come closer than before to telling him the truth. I had nothing more to say, so I waited for him to speak. Finally he began.

"When I was in prison camp in Korea there was this kid there. He was pretty young, but we stuck together. This kid, he was a college boy, like you. Real smart. We were together there for about a year, in the same compound and all. I took care of him a lot—

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he was pretty sick when we got there, and he never got too strong on the diet. So I sort of nursed him. Well, we promised each other that when we got out of there and back to the States we would throw a big drunk, and sometimes we talked for hours about that drunk . . . and the women.

"Then we got exchanged and shipped to Japan, and then on a troop ship back to the States. When we got to Seattle this kid and me went out the first night. Well, I got loaded right away, but he, he didn't drink too much, and just kept sitting there and looking at me and the wall and grinning kind of. And I kept drinking, and pretty soon I didn't know what was happening.

"I woke up the next morning and there was both my arms swollen up like melons. There was this tattoo on them. I asked the kid what happened and he said I told him I wanted to get tattooed the night before. He said he took me to this place and I asked him what to have put on my arms, so he told the guy to put on this. He told me it meant 'The shit hit the fan.'

"Right away I didn't believe him. I didn't never want to get tattooed before. Why should I then? And why this crap on my arms anyway? So I asked him if he was lying, and he sort of didn't look me in the eyes, see, and he said no. But I didn't believe him, and he left for home the next day and I never saw him again.

"You know when I first saw you, you reminded me of him. You're the same kind of wise young guy. What's it to you anyway how I got this tattoo? Why are you so interested in what them words say? I mean . . . you wouldn't have that tattooed on me would you? Not after being my buddy for a year in prison camp, and living with me every day and all? That ain't right. Because I did take care of him in camp and everything, and just because he had a college degree he didn't have no right to do this, did he? I mean, I'm not so stupid as that."

"I don't think I'd do that to you," I said. But suddenly I felt a need to dispel this mocking spectre of myself. "Are you sure he did it?" I asked him. "Didn't you ever want to get tattooed, as some kind of souvenir of that time?"

"No. He did it by himself. It don't matter, I guess. Maybe that was his way of saying goodbye, or saying he thought I was all right. Anyhow, when I saw you it reminded me of him, and I wanted

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to take that test. I guess I won't bother to try it again, but I guess I don't much care about it now."

After a few moments he rose, wished me good luck again, and left.

I had come closer to convincing him, and because I had I felt a dull shame. I had still deceived him—and myself, almost—even though he might believe only temporarily what I had propounded; and as the minutes passed after his departure I became increasingly struck with my duplicity. To be sure, I thought, the glories of the world pass, but what else is there? For me, even for him? And because I had made him believe that there was something else—though I hadn't been able to tell him what it was—even when I knew there wasn't and never could be again, I was sorry. Plainly, I had not brought him very much nearer to the truth.

At Goose Air Base in Labrador the library is situated directly below the Service Club ballroom. As one reads, bits of plaster drop out of the chinks in the wooden ceiling onto the book. The Latin rhythms of the orchestra and the shuffling of feet on the floor above ravage all the senses. One's eyes bump across the surface of the page to the beat of the music, perceiving rhythms not words. Yet the illusion of reading is there; pages are turned, the story moves forward, just as in the Army one can acquire the illusion of learning and working at learning. So much of what we do lies in the formal gesture, in the insistence through imitation that one is really getting on with intellectual matters. It is a kind of snare our culture has baited for us, and in the Army, where we are more American than anywhere else, we are all its catch.

Two flights of stairs lead from the Club to this library; between them on the wall of the landing is a mural. It is a picture of Knowledge. She is tall and slender, with flaming red hair, full breasts, and long bare legs—she looks something like Rita Hayworth. She stands unshod upon the globe, and at her feet sit two bedazzled airmen with books open idly before them. She has seduced them into putting down their pool-cues and taking up their text-books. She is beauty and power and success, and she transcends the world in serene possession of her virtues.

If this were Knowledge we should all be lechers. Yet this is

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the image we all keep in our secret minds, and its lack or its loss can break our hearts. Once we are legally possessed of it, we hope, once we own our GED, all things, all finer things, will come to us like Noah's animals, of themselves. Perhaps it is our particular lot to find that beauty and truth, our beauty and truth, are disparate and even antagonistic to each other. They do not, it is certain, inhabit that part of ourselves that lives abroad in our institutions, and whatever else there is of us, in our time and place, has yet to be discovered.

READY TO ROLL

To Mexico! To Mexico! down the dovegrey highways, past the police of atomic cities, past the fiery border to dream cantinas!

I see myself standing on the sunny metropolitan plateau, stranger and prince on the street, dollars in my pocket, free, alone, genitals and thighs and buttocks under skin and leather.

Music! Taxis! Marijuana! Ancient sexy parks! Boulevards in America! Modern downtown for a nickel! A dime for Les Ambassadeurs! Here is a hard brown cock for a quarter!

Drunkenness! and the long night walks down strange brown streets, eyes, windows, buses, interior charnels behind the Cathedral, lost squares and hungry tacos, a calf's head cooked and picked apart for meat,

and the blackened inner roofs and tents of the market, street crisscrossed on street, a naked hipster labyrinth, stealing, pausing, loitering, noticing drums, purchasing nothing

but the broken aluminum coffeepot with a torn doll's arm sticking up out of the mouth.

Haha! what do I want? Change of solitude, spectre of drunkenness in paranoiac taxicabs, fear and gaiety of unknown lovers coming round the empty streetcorner

dark eyed and watching me make it there alone under the new hip moon.

Allen Ginsberg

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Lionel Abel

IN THE SACRED PARK

For Meyer Schapiro

The great poet is always an *amateur* poet, in need of what Goethe called "occasional" inspiration: at the same time he has to be a *professional* poet, given to the continual practice of his craft and able to produce at will, as Hopkins has it, "good" parnassion; and he will also necessarily be a *total* poet, since for greatness the commitment he gives to his art must involve his whole nature.

So the great poet is rich. He is also poor. He has three postures toward poetry, but of these only one can finally typify him. Thus we see at once that Baudelaire is a total poet, though the amateur and professional are clearly evident in him; and we see that Pound and Eliot are professional poets, though their commitment to poetry is as thorough as you please; and, clearly, they allowed themselves *enough* of the amateur to be *great* as professionals.

But where are we to find the maker of great verse whose attitude was essentially that of an amateur? The name that comes to mind is that of Wallace Stevens. To call him an amateur poet implies no questioning of his attachment to poetry and no imputation against his professional skill. My claim is simply that by seeing Stevens as an amateur we can best gain access to the meaning of his poet's craft and, paradoxically, to the real extremity of his commitment to his art. In viewing Stevens, we should emphasize what he himself emphasized, underlining in him what his own verses underline. This modern master gave to his amateur's attitude a singular content, yet one that is intrinsically historical; he is wholly contemporary, yet there is, in fact, no one else like him, no one with whom, except for certain details of craft, he may be profitably compared.

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Stevens died in August, 1955. As yet there is no biography of him, and the few facts we have of his career we owe to Alfred Kreymborg and to William Van O'Connor. The latter's book on Stevens, *The Shaping Spirit,* is, in the main, an analysis of Stevens's poetry, but covers in one brief chapter the objective data that have thus far been made public about the poet's life. What we have here are, for the most part, fairly unrevealing facts, like the date of the poet's birth, 1879; we are informed that he attended Harvard until 1900 and graduated from New York Law School in 1904; and we can make what we can of the following data: his ancestry was Dutch, his wife's Polish; he had one daughter, Holly Bright, and such and such of his poems were published at such and such intervals. Finally a detail which, though well-known, cannot but give one, when stated, a sense of imminent revelation. As Mr. Van O'Connor puts it: "Wallace Stevens has engaged the imaginations of his fellow poets on many scores, not least that he has been an insurance lawyer with, and since 1914 a vice-president of the Hartford Accident and Indemnity Company." Having told us this fact and insisted on its significance, Mr. Van O'Connor is oddly enough determined that the fact itself should tell us nothing. He goes so far as to inveigh against the image of Stevens which Alfred Kreymborg, who had been a friend of the poet, sketched out for us in his book *Our Singing Strength.* This image Mr. Van O'Connor calls a legend. Why? Because Kreymborg felt very strongly the peculiarity of Stevens's position as a business man, in that it involved on Stevens's part the conscious rejection of a professional poet's career. Evidently for Mr. Van O'Connor, Kreymborg's image was of a poet not utterly intent on producing poetry, and it was this conception of Stevens that aroused his protest. But since a certain detachment from poetry on the part of Stevens is quite evident, the whole point is to determine the significance of his detachment, which is what we are attempting here.

What about Alfred Kreymborg's picture? According to him, Stevens, extremely shy and reticent, was for most of his life almost completely withdrawn from the literary scene. He does not appear to have followed the many controversies of clashing literary movements or to have participated in the successive revolts against tradition and supports of it, that highlighted the literary world for

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almost fifty years—the years, by the way, during which Stevens elaborated his own poetic concepts and matured his unique style. Stevens's first book, *Harmonium,* was published in 1923, when he was already in his forties, and it has been alleged that this book appeared because of the insistence of his friends. Though the creator of a rare and subtle kind of verse, belonging to the modern tradition of "difficult" poetry, Stevens, for years, made almost no effort to propagandize for such poetry or to educate people to a better appreciation of it. Apparently he did not regard himself as essentially a man of letters. But did he think of himself as first of all a man of affairs? In any case he was often bored with business, with the practical adventures of money-making, the language of lawsuits and insurance cases. He would go off on a vacation to Florida, to the Carolinas, to Havana. It seems he always liked to live well. Drawn toward new, more exotic and colorful places, he would feel the need to speak a more pleasurable and attractive language. He would write poems. And these poems were hardly ever intended as esthetic commodities, produced to satisfy the demand of any specific audience; no more were they directed toward the public in general. They seem to have sprung from a personal need for consummation, being part of Wallace Stevens's good time.

This image I believe to be, in the main, accurate. However, my reason for accepting this picture of the poet is fundamentally his poetry itself.

In his fine essay, *Examples of Wallace Stevens,* Richard Blackmur writes: "The most striking, if not the most important thing about Mr. Stevens's verse is its vocabulary." Herein we find a profusion of words that are not part of customary usage; many words that are archaic, and many foreign words—from French, Italian, Latin, Spanish—which under Stevens's auspices make their first appearance into English poetry. Blackmur has selected such highly typical words, and I can do no better than cite the very words he chose to list, since I want to disagree with his judgment as to the reason for their presence. They are: *fubbed, girandoles, curlicues, catarrhs, gobbet, diaphanes, clopping, miniscule, pipping, pannicles, carked, ructive, rapey, cantilene, buffo, fiscs, phylactery, princox* and *funest.* "Not a word listed above is used preciously," writes Black-

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mur, and a section of his essay is devoted to a detailed argument for this wrong contention, as I see it. Obviously these words were chosen for themselves, not only functionally. They express a certain *taste for preciosity* which cannot be denied, as Blackmur tries to do, by showing that in satisfying this taste they are employed masterfully. The fact is that Stevens likes words of rare effect; moreover he has a predilection for long, many-syllabled words like *titivating, idiosyncratic, titillations,* etc. Now I submit that the association of such long, even superfluously syllabic words with the verbal oddities Blackmur has catalogued, produces an effect of linguistic opulence. This is fine, fancy and expensive language. It is not the speech of a poet seeking the *mot juste,* but the right speech for the poet Stevens, who happens to have been extremely well-to-do in words.

Contributing to this effect of richness is a less analyzable but equally effective factor, the way in which the words are held together in combination, the textures produced by the manner of juxtaposition:

> *In that November off Tehuantapec*
> *The night-long slopping of the sea grew still.*
> *A mallow morning dozed upon the deck*
> *And made one think of musky chocolate*
> *And frail umbrellas.*

When we read such a passage we feel confronted with a veritable cake of language, ornamented with the most costly and unprocurable trimmings, and however much we may admire the skill needed to concoct the cake we cannot fail to take on an added pleasure in its ingredients. Shall we suppose that Stevens did not?

The verbs in Stevens's poems should show the kind of activities he is interested in describing. They turn out to be of a supremely comfortable sort. Such verbs as *rumble, flutter, nibble, jig, jollify, gobble, gloze, dawdle, undulate* and *mulct* are highly typical. It will be observed that the above verbs—which I have chosen more or less at random—describe activities which, with one exception, involve neither the infliction nor the experiencing of pain. Except for one verb, they may all be said to be at the very opposite pole from the compulsive or the violent. The one exception, is of course, the

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verb *mulct*. But I think this word is disinfected of its violent connotation of depriving someone of something by the fact that it is not a term in current usage. The archaic quality of the word softens its finality. And when I note that actions are further qualified in Stevens's poems by such words as *bland, dainty, facile, voluble, delicate* and *placid,* I think I find support for my view that the activities with which Stevens's poems deal are of an easy-going and nondrastic character.

Strengthening this impression is the fact that there are so many objects which may be classified as dear or desirable to the comfortable idler: pianos, mandolins, guitars, banjos. There are, and in abundance, chocolates, caramels, licorice, ice creams, fruits of all descriptions, perfumes and parasols; there are of birds, the toucan, the jay, the tanninger, the flamingo, the swan, the parakeet and the parrot, birds curious and colorful that, like works of art, have distraction value. Nor are works of art missing. And there are statues and parks.

Stevens's poems are heavily pigmented. He has an extensive palette, and a feeling not only for blue, green, red, etc., fairly common in poetry nowadays, but also for rasberry, jelly-yellow, chocolate, turquoise, purple, gold-vermillion, pink and iris. Comparing Stevens's use of color with that of the French genius, Arthur Rimbaud, I find a contrast sharp enough to be worth noting. Rimbaud was as ardent a colorist as Stevens, though his palette was rather more limited and conventional. But what strikes one in Rimbaud is the violent and explosive effects he managed to produce with his limited color range. For him, color symbolized the violence of reality; in his verses colors are like the banners of the metaphysical, mobilizing our sensibility for violent exertions. With his infinitely less restricted range of colors, Stevens produces the most opposite effects; decorative patterns, arabesques, fleeting and evanescent shades. To point the contrast, let me say that in Rimbaud, colors are not at all on the surfaces of things but seem to emanate from the depths of their material structure, while in Stevens's poetry colors are costumes, skillfully designed, artfully applied.

And the moods of Stevens's poems are meditative and leisurely, with the lack of tension characteristic of someone whose spiritual problem is to choose between alternatives of sensuous enjoyment. And

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here is a further fact: the locale of many of these poems, the sites mentioned as relevant to feeling, are places in Florida, the Carolinas, Cuba and Mexico, places noted in the Western hemisphere as attractive to tourists and vacationers.

So far most of what I have noted about Stevens's poems may be experimentally confirmed. To do so one has only to consult the texts. Now I shall risk a generalization.

The poetry of Wallace Stevens is, let it not be forgotten, wonderfully unlike anything else in poetry. Everything profound, says Nietzsche, draws a limited horizon around itself. The poetry of Wallace Stevens accords with that condition, being brightly definite, most particularly what it is. There is a circle around it differentiating it from poetry of any other kind. So far I have been following the circle. Now I shall try to see what lies inside it.

And so the question to which I have been leading up is as follows: What judgment about existence lies at the heart of this very fancy language, which describes comfortable activities, catalogues objects intriguing to the idler, which is always colorful and ever bent on decorating, speaking in relaxed and meditative tones in the context of sites attractive to vacationers? What is the content of Wallace Stevens's poetry? What is its Idea, in the Platonic sense?

One thing I am certain of, the judgment I am looking for—it may not even be explicitly expressed in Stevens's work—will take the form of a decision as to the rights of poetry with respect to life. For the relationship of life to poetry is ever pursued as a mystery, a puzzle, and a charm in Stevens's verses. At the outset I characterized Stevens's attitude as that of an amateur poet. Let me now venture to say what the content of that attitude is. Generally speaking, the amateur poet, occupied for the most part with other affairs, responds to certain special occasions, love, death or friendship, with works of poetry. May not Stevens, following this example in his own special manner, have taken his cue for inspiration from that *system of occasions* when all men put aside professionalism and toil and address themselves to pursuits over which only the pleasure they feel can properly preside? The moment of moral release from the obligation of work may, for Stevens, have inaugurated the musical movement from the prosaic to the poetical. The pleasure in language taken by the poet at all times would thus become appropriate, being

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placed in context with the objects of everybody's pleasure. May not poetry, for Stevens, have been the language of vacations? He has written:

How easily the feelings flow somewhere
Over the simplest words.
It is too cold for work now in the fields.

The value of my hypothesis is that with it in mind one can see at once how subject matter is characteristically transformed in Stevens's poetry. When he tried to handle some grave aspect of experience, love or death, for example, he was not free, rhetorically free that is, to treat it without a certain deliberate lightness, and even a touch of frivolity. Love becomes

. . . a book too mad to read
Until one merely reads to pass the time.

Death becomes "the emperor of ice cream." Typically, when Stevens wanted to write a poem about the workers, he described them, not at their work in the factory, but in their idle enjoyment of Sunday in the park.[1] He has written a poem about a dictator, whom he situated on a yacht named the "Masculine." Objects became poetic for him when yielding to pleasurable inspection and released from the serious contexts in which they generally inhere. He saw Lenin —how?

On a bench beside a lake disturbed
By swans.

In a lecture he gave on the relation of imagination to reality, wanting to exemplify his general view, what he called his "intimidating thesis," Stevens remarked: "We must limit ourselves to saying that there are so many things, which, as they are, and without any intervention of the imagination, seem to be imaginative objects, that it is no doubt true that absolute fact includes everything that the imagination includes. . . . One sees demonstrations of this everywhere. For example, if we close our eyes and think of a place where it would be pleasant to spend a holiday. . . ." (*The Figure of the*

1 Also noted by Delmore Schwartz, I believe, in the *Harvard Advocate*'s Stevens number.

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Youth as Virile Poet). Could anything be more clear? Wanting to concretize his view of the relation of poetry to reality, the image which spontaneously came to Stevens's mind was of a spot where it would be "pleasant to spend a holiday." In the same lecture he defined poetry as "the unofficial view of being."

An amateur poet. But in arguing that, have I not argued too much? For indubitably Stevens was a *great* poet. Now it was remarked at the outset that the great poet has *three* postures, though he can be typified by only *one* of these, and that if the great poet is rich he is also poor. So far I have tried only to set forth the essential and characteristic limitation of Wallace Stevens. I have dealt only with his poverty. But this poverty is interesting to us because it was the foundation of a poetic fortune, in fact, one of the great poetic fortunes of our time.

So Stevens must also have been a professional poet, a maker and a craftsman of the very highest order. And so indeed he was. This should be clear enough from the quality of his verse itself, and from the fact that during some fifty years of writing he continued to develop and perfect the instrument his amateur muse employed. This instrument is not at all of the sort the typical amateur poet finds to hand at those moments when some occasion compels him to compose. Most generally, your amateur poet relies on the conventional rhetoric of his period. Now Stevens's rhetoric is a consummately polished one, tuned to his particular and special purposes. The craftsmanship of Stevens's verse has been so well explored in Richard Blackmur's justly famous essay, to which I referred before, that there is no need to say anything further on the subject. The point of interest here is that the professional poet Stevens cannot but have been was kept secret from the world, perhaps even from himself. During the major part of his career Stevens consistently refused to identify himself socially as a poet. In the last ten years of his life—during which time there was a noticeable decline in the quality of his verse—he became more inclined to admit the existence of the professional poet in himself. He published a book of essays on poetry, *The Necessary Angel,* and lectured on poetry at Princeton and at Harvard. After his lecture at Harvard, though, he is reported to have remarked to some of the students and literary men who heard him,

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"What would the boys in the office think of me if they saw me here?" But throughout the writing of *Harmonium, Ideas of Order, The Man with the Blue Guitar,* the professionally skilled maker, whose craft was called upon by Stevens in his moments of inspired leisure, was kept in the background, negated, undervalued, snubbed even, and, I submit, had to be so treated for Stevens's performance to be of the very first quality. Consider the spiritual tension needed for the poet to maintain over a long period such non-recognition of his own acts of craftsmanship. But whoever said that masterpieces are created easily?

In modern times the poet has tended to be essentially a professional, and this has meant what is certainly an over-valuation of all the formal problems of poetic technique. In the discussions of Eliot and his disciples, even the question of belief has been often treated as a question of technique, as if what a poet believed were most important of all with respect to its effect on his poetry and had a craft meaning rather than a human one. So considered, all beliefs tend to become beliefs about poetry, even when they seem to be beliefs about God, history, civilization, etc. Now the poetry of Stevens is refreshingly free from what has become the prevailing atmosphere of modern poetry, characterized by the efforts of poets to vindicate their *vocation* as a serious and important one. Presenting himself before the world as a non-professional, Stevens was free to concentrate on the purely pleasurable content of his art. If he denied himself the enjoyment of the poet's public role, he on the other hand seems to have enjoyed poetry as no other modern poet has done.

But can Stevens also have been a *total* poet? Is there not a deeper contradiction between the total poet and the amateur than between the amateur poet and the professional? Perhaps not. What if Stevens elected to be an amateur so that his relation to poetry could be a more complete one than that implied by a professional career? What if it was *for the sake of poetry itself* that he refused to extend the first privilege to the problems of poetry as a craft, as a technique, as a carefully pursued study of verbal structures, as "work"—all of which constitutes the professional poet's intense and constant concern? In an interview with a *Times* reporter, Stevens remarked that he never rewrote a poem beyond the point where work on it became "forced labor," which shows us that his amateur's attitude was pres-

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ent even in his mode of correcting his poems. But our point here is that the rejection of poetry as "work" may very well have another meaning than that of limiting it in relation to life.

I will even venture to say that the amateur poet is actually closer to the total poet than the professional poet can be. Hoelderlin called poetry the most innocent as well as the most dangerous of activities. He left out of account altogether those matters of technique which the professional poet always makes supreme. Conceiving poetry in Hoelderlin's terms, we can at once locate the figure of Wallace Stevens at one of the poles of the definition cited; Stevens chose to emphasize that aspect of poetry which makes it the most innocent of activities.

But if poetry is also the most dangerous of activities, this is because it treats of the sacred. If we now want to compare the three attitudes toward poetry we have so far discussed, we can do no better than describe their relation to the sacred. The total poet will treat of the sacred directly; not merely of what is sacred to him, but of what is sacred to other men as well. The professional poet delimits the sacred within his own professional sphere; poetry for him becomes the sacred and also *the only means of access to it*; thus the professional poet's contact with the sacred separates him from other men.[2] And the amateur poet? Let us not conclude too quickly that nothing is sacred to him, for then he would not even be an amateur poet, he would not be a poet at all. Though he treats of the sacred only occasionally, yet like the total poet he discovers it outside and not within his special sphere.

That Wallace Stevens, a secular poet if ever one were, has had something to say about the sacred too, should be evident on reading *Sunday Morning,* one of his greatest poems:

2 Randall Jarrell is perfectly correct in charging those who condemn modern poetry as "obscure" with an incapacity to understand any kind of poetry, traditional *or* modern. Certainly those who do not understand Eliot are unlikely to understand Milton, or at least certain passages in Milton. But what Jarrell has not faced is that for the modern poet, almost always a professional, the poem is a means of contact with a reality which the mere reader will not be able to grasp. Even if the reader "understands" it, that is, finds what it says intelligible, the poem will be unlikely to "save" or "redeem" him, as the making of it "saved" and "redeemed" the poet. Now the total poet, modern or traditional, takes for his theme that which "saves" and "redeems" and is not restricted in its "saving" and "redeeming" to poets only.

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Complacencies of the peignor, and late
Coffee and oranges in a sunny chair,
And the green freedom of a cockatoo
Upon a rug mingle to dissipate
The holy hush of ancient sacrifice.
She dreams a little, and she feels the dark
Encroachment of that old catastrophe.
As a calm darkens among water lights
The pungent oranges and bright, green wings
Seem things in some procession of the dead
Winding across wide water, without sound.
The day is like wide water, without sound,
Stilled for the passing of her dreaming feet
Over the seas, to silent Palestine
Dominion of the blood and sepulchre.

In this magnificent and prophetic poem Stevens actually explores the possibility of a Sunday Morning which can have more meaning to us than even the believer's:

Why should she give her bounty to the dead?
What is divinity if it can come
Only in silent shadows and in dreams?
Shall she not find in comforts of the sun,
In pungent fruit and bright, green wings, or else
In any balm or beauty of the earth
Things to be cherished like the thought of heaven?

He asks. And he envisages, if not a new religion, then at least a new rite:

Supple and turbulent, a ring of men
Shall chant in orgy on a summer morn
Their boisterous devotion to the sun,
Not as a god, but as a god might be. . . .

But it might be argued that if in announcing the possibility of a new faith, and in summing up for us the resonance of the old, Stevens took on the major accent of the total poet, yet this was true of him only in one exceptional and very great poem. What about the rest of his poetry, so concerned with distraction and amusement?

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But it is at least highly probable that for us moderns the sacred is present—outside of authentic religious experiences—at precisely those junctures of life where the reality of time impinges on us most violently. Let us recall the importance Pascal attached to the need men feel for distracting themselves, and his contention that this need leads inevitably to the question of religion. Indeed a modern ethnologist, Marceau Eliade, asserts that only in pastimes does the sacred appear at all in the modern world. He writes:

> the defense against time, which all mythological behavior reveals, but which is consubstantial with the human condition, we find again, but camouflaged for the modern, mainly in his distraction, in his amusements . . . the real fall into time began with the secularization of work. It is only in modern societies that man feels himself a prisoner of his profession, for within it he can no longer escape from time. And because he cannot kill time during his hours of work—when in possession of his real social identity—he makes an effort to escape from time in his free hours.

The sacred not in our work but in our play! But if this is true, then Stevens, in the whole of his poetry, concerned as it is with distraction, amusement and pleasurable meditation, has encompassed an encounter with the sacred which was not his alone but belongs to all of us. As an amateur he found a way to be not just his own poet but ours also. Valéry says that in every poet there is a very old man. In the voice of Wallace Stevens we hear the oldest of poets, the poet of feasts and festivals, who by means of the magic of language made time stand still for the whole of his tribe. For Stevens, the amateur, was not forced to feel that he took up his tools just when others laid down theirs; he could participate with them, in his own fashion, in the sacred venture of making escape from time. Thus he was able to see in the lives of those around him a relationship to poetry, and, accepting this perception, he could transfigure it, so as to be at one with his fellows even when most remote from them, not disdainful of their jukeboxes even while strumming his Blue Guitar. He found nothing less than a historically given exit from the historically given, a breakthrough out of time, if not into eternity. Taking for his theme those sorties from the daily round which brighten the colors of the world for everyone, he was able to make his own entrances into poetry neither romantically extravagant nor arrogantly individual but virile, periodic, unserious, and wise.

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"Bethou me," says the sparrow to the speckled blade in Stevens's *Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction,* and then, in a burst of musical megalomania, the injunction is extended to include us, the readers: "And you and you bethou me and bethou. . . ." Further on, the poet himself urges that the singer be obeyed, "Bethou him you and you, bethou him and bethou. . . ." Suppose we obey and yield up our identity to that of the poet. At least we know where we are: in a park, that was once a sacred wood, on a day free from work that was once a holy day. And our words, whether new or old, will be rare and bright, and whatever we speak of, whether it be of love or death or politics or prayer or pleasure or pain, will be transformed into poetry, the poetry of our time, into a suave yet saving poetic language of our age.

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Boris Pasternak

TWO POEMS

THE MEETING

Since six o'clock—since four—since two—
That morning water had been tearing
Out of sockets, pipes and pools,
Off fences, roofs—from wind.

On slippery sidewalks wind had torn
The water up like gunnysack;
And you could walk as far as Podolsk
And not meet a single soul.

Six o'clock: and on a scrap
Of landscape, from steps grown
Suddenly sodden, a weary "See you tomorrow,"
Split off and crashed into the water.

Far off with automatic block
And grinding tackle, relishing
The drains of coming day, the East
Cast its spell mechanically.

And blowsy distance, all dolled-up,
And dozing over cold kvass soup
In frost, cried out and gave a cough
From March's drunken bouillabaisse.

The cold hand of the landscape led
The author and the March night as
They walked, side by side and still
Disputing, from that meeting home.

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As the author and the March night briskly
Walked, from time to time they could
Observe a flickering—as if real—
Then suddenly concealing ghost.

As in an amphitheater
At dawn, appearing at an augur's cry,
"Tomorrow" uttered on
The steps rushed upon them both.

It came like a joiner with his frame
And moulding: buildings, temples, trees
Appeared in the bottomless square of the frame
Alien, and belonging elsewhere.

To the right, across the square they moved,
Retreating in hexameter;
And being removed, were lugged off
For dead. And none remarked the loss.

THIRD VARIATION ON A THEME

Stars were rushing by. Capes lay bathed
In the sea. Salt went blind, and tears dried up.
The bedroom lay in darkness; thoughts rushed by
As the Sphinx intently listened to the Sahara.

Candles guttered and the blood of the
Colossus appeared to freeze. The desert's
Blue smile overflowed its lips; and when
The tide ebbed, night began to waste away.

From Morocco a breeze began to stir the sea; a Syrian
Wind blew as Archangel snored in snow;
The first draught of *The Prophet*
Dried as day glimmered on the Ganges.

(*Translated from the Russian by R. Gregg*)

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Cushing Strout

LIBERALISM, CONSERVATISM AND THE BABEL OF TONGUES

Hegel's vivid metaphor for the process through which philosophical truth is established—"the bacchanalian revel, where not a soul is sober"— is a fair description of the current state of political philosophy in America. But he had in mind, of course, the majesty of the dialectic in its march, and the contemporary debate is rather more like confusion confounded. Perhaps another of his apothegms is more relevant: the owl of Minerva flies only after the shades of dusk have fallen. American political thought has never waited for twilight. Inspired by practical problems, like the need for a stronger federal government in 1787, the agitation over slavery in the 1850's, or the demand for regulation of business and provision for economic security since 1900, philosophy has been programmatic and closely geared to a pragmatic context of events. What it has lost in depth it has gained in pertinence.

Since the New Deal, controversy over the welfare state and Communism has provoked a fresh flutter of the dovecotes. Liberalism, which has often prided itself on having a philosophy in contrast to the complacent traditionalism of conservatives, has lost the philosophical initiative to conservatism. Liberals have been burdened by their opponents with all the intellectual frivolities of sentimental utopianism, the soft-minded platitudes of progressive education, and the deluded innocence of fellow-travelling. In spite of all the efforts to make liberalism a scapegoat for every lapse of modern intelligence or to relegate it to the historical lumber-room for archaic survivals, liberal programs for limited welfare-state measures, collective security in foreign affairs, and equal rights for Negroes have wonderfully prospered. Even the fever produced by the McCarthy syndrome has abated, and the Supreme Court is showing a strong interest in the patient's recovery. If liberals lose many a battle in America, they have a formidable talent for winning the campaigns. Their victories are perhaps ample compensation for their lack of a Clausewitz.

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Success is often blind, however, and the liberal too easily forgets that the latitudinarianism of the liberal temper of the 1920's and 1930's admitted to the fold some very dubious communicants. By their narrow absorption in the practical issues of New Deal policy at home and abroad, their frequent indulgence of a technocratic dream of a "rationally" planned society, or their giddy intoxication with the slogans of the Popular Front, liberals undermined the philosophical pinions of their own position. They have no right to be surprised at the fashionable popularity of the New Conservatism in post-war America. To admit and lament the rout of liberal philosophy is not, however, to acknowledge and praise the success of the New Conservatism. The scene it presents is at least as confused as any of the clouded vistas of the 1930's.

If we are dazzled by the new conservatives, it is not by their brilliance but by the blinding blaze of all those pin-wheels roaring in so many different directions. Like burning a Roman candle at both ends, the effect is startling. No doubt "a revolt against revolt," as Peter Viereck has dubbed the movement, is bound to be an affair of paradoxes. The muddle begins with Viereck himself whose conservatism, for all his refurbishing of Metternich, is quite non-political. He is a friend of the Western European socialist governments and thinks that for American right-wingers to attack them is "the stupidest and wickedest thing American conservatives could do." His real quarrel is with ethical relativism, and his somewhat breezy praise of the aristocratic spirit of decorum is wholly divorced from any respect for an aristocratic class, "increasingly anachronistic and functionless" in modern society.

Russell Kirk can make a more authentic claim to being a full-fledged conservative, though his anguished polemical tone seldom convinces the reader that here is a man serenely enjoying a great tradition and "the unbought grace of life." Brandishing his Burke with the fervor of a radical appealing to the holy writ of Marxism, he laments the loss of a traditional organic society led by cultivated Christian gentlemen whose inferiors know their place in the divine scheme of things. Eloquent in his scorn for ideologues, he makes an abstract ideology out of Burke and in the shrill invective of the iconoclast castigates contemporary Americans, "half-strangled in the rank undergrowth of modern passions," for their liberal sins. Yet hungry for established tradition he claims in the same breath that "our native conservatism extends to every class and interest in our society" so that "it is quite natural for us to be, nowadays, the chief conservative power among the nations." This ambivalence is the price he pays for trying to cut America to English cloth made in the eighteenth century. Repelled by "tractors,

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Bob Hope, self-service laundries, direct primaries, clover-leaf intersections, high-school extra-curricular activities, two evening newspapers, Coca-Cola, and a stylish burial at Memory Grove Cemetery," it is no wonder that he is forced to admit in a burst of candor that "the conservative, in our time, must be prepared for the role of Don Quixote." It is a mark of the homelessness of his conservatism that to bring it into touch with practical politics he is compelled to find a platform in the angry pages of William Buckley's *National Review*, which in mingling a fondness for the unbridled demagoguery of Senator McCarthy with a nostalgia for the Manchester liberalism of Herbert Spencer produces by some strange alchemy a bitter "conservative" alloy.

Clinton Rossiter, Cornell political scientist and historian, has bravely tried to clear the air by branding as pseudo-conservative the advocates of old-fashioned laissez-faire or "100 percent Americanism," while also rejecting as too exotic a plant for our non-feudal soil the English conservatism of a Burke, a Disraeli, or a Russell Kirk. What position remains for the genuine conservative, emancipated from shibboleths and romanticism, is something of a puzzle. The mystery deepens when Rossiter declares that the best conservative thinking on contemporary problems has been done by liberals and progressives like David Lilienthal, Senator Paul Douglas, Reinhold Niebuhr, Adlai Stevenson. "When the one glorious thing to be conservative about was the Liberal tradition of the world's most liberal society," he says, defining his own dilemma, "how could a conservative be expected to be Conservative?" Since Rossiter reveres constitutional democracy, the Bill of Rights, New Deal welfare measures, and the ideal of equal opportunity for all races, his differences with liberals become a matter of the most amiable splitting of the finest hairs. He thinks most American conservatives would be proud to accept as their own the title of "tough-minded Liberal realist" which he applies to Lincoln. Unhappily or not, it is far more likely that many of them would beg God to protect them from such friends.

If the New Conservatives do little to clarify the philosophical scene, our liberal historians cannot claim to give undivided counsel. A measure of their confusion is represented in two recent books, *The Decline of American Liberalism* by Arthur A. Ekirch, Jr. and *The Liberal Tradition in America* by Louis Hartz, which come to exactly opposite conclusions. Ekirch, in the sober tones of a calm scholar, tells a Spenglerian story of the steady waning of liberalism in America ever since the days of the Revolution. He offers to liberals only the satisfaction of looking back with pleasure "into the distant past, while they do their best to

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challenge the fate held out by an increasingly illiberal future." Hartz, on the contrary, with rare dialectical brilliance, treats American history as "the bizarre fulfillment of liberalism," producing a nation so rooted in the liberal individualistic assumptions of Locke that it can understand neither itself nor others unless it learns to transcend its own perspective.

Ekirch's protest against the usual optimistic interpretation of our history in terms of a "rise" or "growth" is refreshing, and his account reminds us of many a dark chapter in what most Americans accept as the greatest success story of all time. He doggedly documents the repressions of free speech and the rights of minorities in times of crisis, the frequent callousness of American dealings with the Indian, the Negro, and the Oriental, the recurrent hostility to Catholics, Jews, and the newer immigrants, and the petulant invasions of social and cultural freedom by self-appointed censors of popular morality. These virtues of his book, however, are overbalanced by the distortions of his frame of reference. Despite his justified criticism of the conventional dualistic view of our history as "a continual struggle between radical and conservative points of view," which has supported the optimistic narration of our past, he perpetuates the same Manichean categories, only this time some of the names have been changed and the villains win.

In Ekirch's book the doomed heroes are always the liberals, though after Jefferson becomes President they seem to be the vanishing Americans. This drastic shortage is easily explained: by his definition a liberal is, like Franklin or the early Jefferson, a child of the late colonial period. He is committed to limited, representative, decentralized government, civil liberties, free enterprise, and a basically agrarian society, and he is hostile to standing armies, a big navy, conscription, and international involvement. With this static definition Ekirch naturally finds that with the coming of industrialism, the expansion of federal powers, and the end of isolationism there has been an atrophy of liberal values.

His thesis has the merit of making it clear that democracy, nationalism, and progressive reform have not necessarily entailed liberal principles or nurtured a liberal temper, yet his whole approach is vitiated by his ahistoric assumption of a frozen liberalism. No one can deny him his evidence that the Jacksonians, the Progressives, or the New Dealers were not wholly liberals in his pristine sense of the word, but Ekirch writes as if liberals should live on nostalgia for a golden age in an idyllic agrarian past. He makes no attempt to question or evaluate traditional liberal ideas in the light of modern developments.

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History since the late colonial days is merely implicitly condemned. Nowhere does he recognize that the concentration of industry compelled liberals to revise the assumptions of competitive laissez-faire, that totalitarian imperialism forced liberals to abandon their pacifism and isolationism, or that fifth-column conspiratorial groups made necessary an examination of Jeffersonian dogmas about toleration of speech and assembly. Ekirch stands outside all these historical problems and is content to mark the distance we have travelled, not surprisingly, since 1776. He admits that the historian "cannot be positive that losses in one direction are not matched by gains in another," but it is the effect of his method to hide that possibility from view.

Hartz presents a much more sophisticated performance. He has a stunning flair for the hidden harmonies and ironic incongruities that come from juxtaposing political ideas, and his book is in one sense a sustained piece of intellectual wit, a sort of comic ballet of ideas in which American conservatives, liberals, and socialists are strangely blinded by a society and culture permeated by individualistic assumptions. Playfully and ingeniously he explores the "liberal cosmos" of America with a Hegelian love of dialectical paradox and a Freudian eye for the compensations and anxieties ideologies express and allay. Employing a comparative method of continual contrast with European political thought and practice, he jumps from one historical reference to another with the agility of Eliza crossing the ice. Hartz makes no concessions to the slow, the literal, the uninformed, or the cautious, and the results, if gay, can be a little bewildering. "America represents the liberal mechanism of Europe functioning without the European social antagonisms," he characteristically writes, "but the truth is, it is only through these antagonisms that we recognize the mechanism." By way of passing illustration he adds: "Remove Wellington from Macaulay, and you have in essence Alexander Hamilton, but the link between the two is not at first easy to see." Nor is it, indeed; but as Hartz runs his course, the reader who enjoys the race gets his second wind.

For all his fancy footwork his basic premise is simple. Following De Tocqueville, Hartz sees the American as having been "born free" in that he has never had to revolt against a domestic feudalism in order to arrive at liberal democracy. By comparison with Europe the United States was born a liberal country with limited government, social mobility, and economic freedom. Without an aristocracy for an ally or a proletariat for an enemy the American middle-class has perpetually frustrated the growth of either a European-style conservatism or socialism, which require the seed-bed of feudal hierarchy. Liberals, having

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no *ancien régime* to attack, have been sober, moderate, and realistic. American "conservatism" in a non-feudal society has been the bourgeois gospel of work and success, reeking with liberal praise of mobility and competition, or an obscurantist Americanism which, in its nightmarish fears of a radical bogey, has hugged to its breast in a blind passion the fetishistic idol of a Constitution that is itself the product of a liberal ethos. What threatens American culture, in Hartz's judgment, is the universal implicit acceptance of a Lockeian vision of individuals with natural rights in an atomistic society where government is always the dread Leviathan. Culture-bound by the liberal realities of American life, liberalism becomes innocent and dogmatic, only half-conscious of itself for lack of an authentic, feudally based conservatism with which to grapple.

To this extent Hartz's thesis illuminates the failure of political philosophy in America. Liberalism is too pervasive to be clearly defined. Begging all the philosophical questions, the American liberal of the New Deal era could follow the President in a "happy pragmatism" which in the guise of mere management of practical problems could invent institutions and programs that strayed far from the Lockeian faith; while the opposition, led by an engineer, ironically enough, was left to suffer the onus of being doctrinaire visionaries, howling in the wilderness for twenty years about the end of "the American way of life." The lack of philosophical acuteness, bred by the success of liberalism, is not without its uses. By Roosevelt's bland blurring of the issues, Eisenhower could later swallow both the TVA and Social Security without having to give much of an account of how he squared these devices with his piety to old-fashioned liberal values.

Just as clearly Hartz's thesis illuminates the dilemma of genuine conservatives who reject the Whig democratic-capitalist ethos of a Daniel Webster, a Herbert Hoover, or an Eisenhower. These conservatives, who seek an alliance with philosophy rather than with the business community, must either remain peripheral to the actual issues of American life or suppress their feudal-aristocratic orientation in order to join forces with the practical "conservatism" of Whiggery. From this point of view Hartz brilliantly exposes the frustrating dilemma of Calhoun in the 1850's, and the same tensions could be found in the New Humanists of the 1920's or in Russell Kirk today.

Hartz's analysis of America as a liberal society is less convincing, however, when he attempts to explain the "redscare mentality" of the 1920's and our own time. How does a liberal society generate such irrational obsessions with secrecy, publicity, and conspiracy at the ex-

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pense of privacy? His answer is that when Americans are drawn into foreign involvement they seek to impose their own national faith of Lockeian liberalism on other nations: "And in a time of ideological war the judgment of others by our norms brings, by automatic reflex, the passionate and fearful intensification of those norms as they apply to ourselves as well." But was it really "liberal absolutism" that inspired Carthy until he had successfully intimidated the State Department, the Cohn, and Schine? Was it ideological dogmatism that led Dulles, Brownell, Nixon, and even Eisenhower to encourage or appease McCarthy until he had succesfully intimidated the State Department, the Voice of America, the U.S. Information Agency, Congress, the Army, and the Executive Branch itself? Hartz tells us much about the shape of ideologies in America, but there is much ideologies do not tell us about the convulsions of the last ten years.

A more concrete diagnosis of our failure to balance the claims of privacy, publicity, and secrecy is found in *The Torment of Secrecy* by Edward A. Shils. Hyper-patriotism, as he demonstrates, is produced by the tensions engendered in a society that has had vast influxes of rapidly assimilated immigrants. In their anxiety to retain ties with their homeland and yet be accepted as unquestioned Americans, immigrants are strongly tempted to make their ancestral enemies the nation's and to assert the proof of their own Americanism by their sensitivity to the "un-Americanism" of others. Groups compete for the purity of their patriotism. Old-stock Americans are suspected by immigrant groups for their stand-offishness, and the former, resentful of their displacement in the seats of power by newer arrivals, are quick to scent alien radicalism on every passing breeze from across the oceans. This restless anxiety about the integrity of American nationality tends in times of crisis to erupt into an irrational drive for solidarity and homogeneity. Too impatiently and suspiciously watched, the melting-pot boils over.

Hartz would have us believe that a common, submerged liberalism creates the absolutist mood of "witch-hunting," but Shils more accurately identifies the American inclination to a "populistic" view of politics as the characteristic feature of McCarthyism. Populism identifies the will of the people with justice and morality. This simplistic democratic prejudice, so strikingly evident in William Jennings Bryan, is not confined to rural areas, the lower class, the uneducated, or the radical. It is ubiquitous in a world where the press, the advertising agencies, the public relations experts, and the pollsters constantly reinforce it. It is not even peculiarly American, for there is a populist current in both fascism and Communism. Wherever it flourishes it generates distrust of

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education, sophistication, the niceties of law, the independence of politicians, and the moderation of a system of checks and balances.

Populism suspects those with power, position, and responsibility of conspiring in secret to frustrate the will of the people, whether the conspirators be the bankers, perfidious Albion, the Jews, the Catholics, or radicals. Gripped by this melodramatic view of the world, the populist mentality dreads privacy, lusts for publicity, and is nervously obsessed with secrecy. It is, of course, a pigeon-hole into which McCarthy, with his mania for conspiracy and publicity, his gravel-voiced contempt for the striped-pants boys of the State Department or the Eastern urbanity of an Acheson, and his urge to invade the institutional independence of the military and political bureaucracies, neatly fits without the ruffle of a feather. He and his cohorts found wide scope for their talents in a situation made explosive by the revengeful resentments bred by twenty years of Democratic rule, the inevitable frustrations of the cold war, in which a MacArthur could have no quick and glorious triumph, and the actual, if limited, danger of Communist conspiracy, which some officials had recognized too late.

Just as psychology has clarified the normal by investigating the abnormal, so can the structure of a free society be envisaged by the analysis of our traumatic response to the Communist problem. What a free society needs is that balanced recognition of the value and limits of privacy, secrecy, and publicity which the McCarthy era highlights by contrast. Here Shils makes significant use of the feudal factor which Hartz finds to be so important by reason of its absence from American society. Whereas American liberals have tended to scorn English society for its aristocratic snobbishness and reserved gentility, Shils argues that hierarchical habits of deference, restraint, and mutual confidence have kept the English from becoming addicted to the heady intoxication of total publicity and absolute secrecy as panaceas for the Communist danger. If this sounds conservative, it is, as Hartz's theme should remind us, a line that American conservatives have never taken.

It is more to the point, however, that Shils's pluralistic plea for diffused centers of power, that respect each other's autonomy is an effort to define a common ground upon which both an intelligent liberalism and conservatism can stand. The suspicion that there is no such meeting-ground is itself a symptom of social derangement. The alienation of many intellectuals from American politics and business in the past, like the bitter anti-intellectualism of many politicians and businessmen since the 1920's, has led both liberals and conservatives into the tragic error of seeking allies in extremist advocates of similar-

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sounding goals rather than in opponents who shared a common respect for moderate means and non-utopian hopes. The polarization of "liberal" fellow-travellers and "conservative" xenophobes badly corrupted political discourse and obscured the central importance of the civilized middle ground both liberalism and conservatism have in common.

Neither liberals nor conservatives alone can create the kind of society Shils describes, in which there is relative institutional autonomy for the sake of responsibility, a sanctioned diversity of loyalties among citizens who are not urged to become homogenized, and a pervading amateur spirit to inhibit the provincial or fanatic specialization that makes men suspicious of the purposes and values of those whose work differs from their own. But both liberals and conservatives can contribute to the growth of such a society by acknowledging their common rejection of the apocalyptic politics of salvation practiced by extremists at either end of the spectrum, who have more in common with each other than either has with liberalism or conservatism.

Whatever their past sins, liberals no longer nurture illusions about Communism, and it was a determined group of conservative senators who finally brought McCarthy to book. Perhaps the process of polarization has been decisively halted, though it is ominous to hear the populistic rumbles of indignation from conservatives against the recent Supreme Court decisions. If the process has been checked, then there is a real possibility for liberals and conservatives to profit from a genuine philosophical dialogue. That would be a refreshing and perhaps liberating novelty.

Liberals might then discover that their "happy pragmatism" is no substitute for a reasoned analysis of "the open society," and conservatives might then realize that their preoccupation with the interests of business, the glories of Algerian success, and the security of a rigid Americanism has little to do with the conservative values of hierarchy and tradition. Both groups might finally shed their populistic prejudices. Whatever the case may have been in the past, the populistic shoe is now on the conservative foot. F. D. R. bridled at the "horse-and-buggy" opinions of the Supreme Court, but all he did was to propose a change in the number of Justices, which had been constitutionally expanded and contracted several times before. It has required the populistic fervor of an ex-radical turned new conservative, James Burnham, to urge (in the *National Review* for July 20, 1957) that "tough, fighting Americans" lead a Congressional investigation of the Court, which has had the nerve to impose decent limits on the lust for publicity and the obsession with secrecy.

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LONDON LETTER

ANGLO-SAXON ATTITUDES

Ever since the First World War—and perhaps from before that—the first problem of any vital, intelligent, and critical young Englishman is that of "coming back to England." In a volume of essays by the so-called "Angry Young Men" just published by McGibbon and Kee, entitled *Declaration,* Mr. Lindsay Anderson expresses sentiments almost identical with those of D. H. Lawrence in the 1920's when he wrote *England, my England,* or of W. H. Auden in the 1930's describing "England this country where no one is well." Anderson writes: "Coming back to Britain is . . . like going back to the nursery. The outside world, the dangerous world, is shut away: its sounds are muffled. Cretonne curtains are drawn, with a pretty pattern on them of the Queen and her fairy-tale Prince, riding to Westminster in a golden coach. Nanny lights the fire, and sits herself down with a nice cup of tea and yesterday's *Daily Express.* . . ."

Mr. Lindsay Anderson is, in 1957, lucky, of course, to have, or have had, a nanny. His reactions, brashly of his generation as they are, do indeed strike one already as a bit dated. Their merit—which they share with Mr. Osborne's—is to remind us that the Welfare State has not turned England into Merrie England, Blake's Jerusalem or even William Morris's Earthly Paradise. Given the fact that England is more civilized, decent, humorous, tolerant, and relaxed (to cite Mr. Anderson's own epithets) than some other places, perhaps the chief surviving virtue of this country is that generation after generation of the young English have felt furious at what they feel to be the loss of vitality, truth and innocence in this country.

The fury, of course, takes the form of blaming the old, because they are felt to be betrayers of life. If one traced the history of this back to the First World War, one would find that the young in the trenches (Siegfried Sassoon, Robert Graves, Wilfred Owen) blamed the old for sending them out to be killed; that D. H. Lawrence blamed the old (particularly the "Georgian" poets) for their peculiar, pastoral attachment to the English countryside; that the young of the 1930's blamed the old for not fighting fascism; and that today the old are blamed

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for the naïveté of their anti-fascism, and for living abroad. In each case, what is being blamed is a previous generation's attempt to express exactly that dissatisfaction with the England of nannies and *The Daily Express* which makes the young foam at the mouth twenty years later. Members of the older generation in the 1930's were extremely reluctant to take up the crusade of the young of that time against fascism, precisely because the most lively and angry of the young men in 1916 had been so bitterly opposed to the "war to save democracy."

The attack on all the attitudes of an older generation just because they come from an older generation provides little more than fodder for journalists, and gives rise to events such as the meteoric career of Mr. Colin Wilson. It means also that in the battle against complacency the positions won by a previous generation are abandoned, because to be old is in itself considered to be complacent. The very effective satire directed by Wyndham Lewis twenty-five years ago against the "war of generations" goes disregarded. In the reaction against what Mr. Martin Seymour-Smith (in a sympathetic criticism) calls the 1930s' "failure to distinguish between human suffering and the crude manifestations of politics," lessons for which some very intelligent men gave their lives and which others analyzed in all their complexity, are dismissed.

One truth understood by all the angry young men of three generations is that England is sadly provincial. Those who do not readily accept the Oxford and Cambridge and London cliques have for long sought alternatives to the dismal standards emanating from the literary world of admiring friendships and cagey enmities: one, to get away from England and go to one of the "centers of civilization" still optimistically supposed to exist on the continent, or to America; the other, to withdraw into a narrower, more concentrated kind of Fortress Province, based on some tough unsnobbish local traditions, or perhaps on some regional culture (Scotland? Wales? Cornwall?), or even on the lives led, the language used, in certain back streets.

A generation ago, the first of these alternatives—going abroad—was the reaction to "England," with the result that Cyril Connolly and Raymond Mortimer, so insistent on the values which they derive from reading French, represent for today's young the London-and-Oxford soaked-in-cosmopolitanism that they feel themselves up against. And it is true—as D. H. Lawrence well knew—that there is a great deal of snobbism about the Frenchiness of this older generation. Mr. Lindsay Anderson quotes from *The New Statesman* an exquisite example of the literary manners of this kind of thing: "It was a great performance,

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but can I add—after being allowed to embrace Mme Feuillère figuratively and with infinite respect—that it was not the greatest conceivable performance? . . . I am sure I heard, with my own ears, *'Soleil je te viens voir pour la dernièr' fois.'* Is it possible that Mme Feuillère could have missed one of the most beautiful e mutes in French literature? I prefer to think I had a momentary black-out . . ." This illustrates an aspect of the English scene which Christopher Isherwood escaped from to Berlin in the 1930's and which Mr. Anderson reacts to by filming "the people of Covent Garden," much as Tom Harrison reacted in the 1930's by founding Mass Observation.

All the same, there may be virtue in prostrating oneself before a French e mute, and if to do so is snobbery, I doubt whether it equals that of Mr. John Osborne who, in another essay in *Declaration,* seems to take the view that no one is worth his consideration who was not brought up in a house with an outside lavatory.

The only question worth asking about a younger generation of writers in England, at any time, is whether—given our complacent provincialism—they are a reaction or a revolution? Reaction means "doing the reverse on all occasions, till you end up just the same." Revolution means really rooting yourself in values which are stronger and truer than those you are opposed to. This is something quite different from introducing new inverted snobberies, and capturing the position of your opponents. D. H. Lawrence, George Orwell, T. S. Eliot (when he was young) and F. R. Leavis, are examples of writers not just "reacting" but really taking up a revolutionary position within the intellectual life of their time.

The "Angries" have often the look of vociferous labor politicians who are doomed to be quickly swallowed up by their opponents. They are critical (and often intelligently so) but it must strike the reader of *Declaration* that most of them seem lacking in the self-criticism which certainly characterized all the writers I have mentioned in the previous paragraph. However, unlike the Apocalyptics, and half a dozen other movements, several of them do have something new to say, and say it well. Kingsley Amis and John Wain combine critical standards with provincial toughness. They have a strong sense of the time and place in which they are writing. It is significant that what is perhaps the best critical essay by John Wain should be on Arnold Bennett.

There is nothing in *Declaration* by Kingsley Amis except a message to the editor saying why he does not want to participate. The essay by John Wain is distinguished by scholarship, critical sense, and intellect from everything else in the volume. Amis and Wain are intel-

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lectuals, academic, despite Amis's anti-"culture" pronouncements, influenced in their criticism by Leavis, in their poetry by Empson. They show, indeed, that Cambridge with the toughly intellectual Empson was perhaps more seminal to the present generation than the Oxford of Auden, Day Lewis, MacNeice and myself.

To Lindsay Anderson this means that Amis represents the old stuff which the new and revolutionary are revolting against. He is scathing about a Fabian pamphlet in which Amis gives his unenthusiastic half-support to the Labour party. It is to John Osborne that he looks for the new note of change. And he is right, of course, that cultivated intellectual superiority backed by academic standards "tarted up" (to use a favorite phrase of Kingsley Amis) make about the stalest modern pastry.

To continue the parallel with the 1930's, John Osborne has the freshness and strength of rhetoric expressed by a personality in which sincerity seems oddly fused with meretriciousness, of another Dylan Thomas. Like Thomas, he is always "different." And perhaps he is more fortunate than Thomas in writing for the stage at the beginning, and not the end, of his career.

What John Osborne has to say is not far from Thomas either, though it has an additional force through being applied to a new kind of hypocritical social situation. He is denouncing the hypocrisy of Welfare State uncharitableness—the idea that today the poor are looked after by Social Security from cradle to grave. His Jimmy Porter, and the hero of *The Entertainer,* are people who—statistically, and officially, as it were—are not supposed to exist in our society, unless, perhaps, by an oversight. The reaction of many of the critics to these plays is that they are not—they cannot be—about "real" people, because the Welfare State has deprived every individual of the right to be economically pitiable. Therefore—the argument goes on—what these characters are commands no objective reason for pity. They should be left alone to stew in their self-pity.

The inexcusability of Osborne's characters being sorry for themselves—or of anyone else being sorry for them—is just what makes them disturbing. And the flimsiness of their actual material situations—that Jimmy Porter and his friend sell sweets, that the Entertainer has managed not to pay income tax for so many years, and is then, without apparent warning, arrested for not doing so—these personal situations balanced out by a vision of the public one which exploits injustice and the pompous nonsense of monarchy: it is this defiance of the socially real which seems outrageous. Mr. Osborne shows how subtly many of

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us have allowed our personal love for our neighbor to be stifled by the idea that we all belong to a socially just state.

His characters have the vitality of people who can act out their situations—the same kind of life as the characters in *Under Milk Wood*. As yet, though, they show no sign of the inner spiritual or even physical life independent of circumstances one finds in the characters of D. H. Lawrence. For I take Lawrence to be the touchstone by which one can judge all the other movements. He himself, in his letters, makes up lists such as "J. C. Squire, Robert Lynd, and T. S. Eliot" as if he can throw all his contemporaries into the same bag. What they have in common, one sees, is "literature," journalism, and a public; and, one might add, "literary criticism." Lawrence stands outside these things, and it is difficult to think of anyone else, except Robert Graves, who does so. The depressing thing about the young is that, fighting their battle against literary journalism, they scarcely seem aware of such dangers. Even John Wain—the most critically intelligent of them—moans plaintively in his essay in *Declaration* that he has a right to expect "critical standards" which would give his second novel a better reception than, apparently, it received.

The young writers, with all their complaints about England, seem scarcely conscious of a world outside England. Or if they are, it is either to get the hell out of here into, or to dismiss as a literary fashion. Programmatically, Mr. Kingsley Amis hopes that there will be no more books about "abroad" (he is just about to publish one himself, but I am sure it will be "with a difference"). The kind of "abroad" writing he might, I think, justifiably feel reserved about, is Mr. Lawrence Durrell's *Justine*: a volume (to which another is now to be added) in which exotic overtones and the myriad-mystified and glamorized background of Alexandria are provided for—a heroine whom most of the characters are in love with. In Kensington, Hampstead, Greenwich Village or any other less opalescent place than Alexandria, Mr. Durrell's heroine would seem a demanding bore. It is easy enough to see that part of the smooth, pleasant, cultured dilettanteism of British letters which the brittle young react against comes from too easy victories over local scenery and people, away from the problem of "coming back to England."

Not that Mr. Durrell is facile. His faults are those most excusable and sympathetic ones of Rilke (in *Malte Laurids Brigge*), Proust when he is writing about Albertine, Henry Miller when he is writing about Greece—complete self-indulgence in the writer's capacity to exaggerate any drop of real experience into an enormously inflated and glamorized

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piece of literature until the reader has the idea that a whole scene of life exists only for the purpose of being turned through the machine of this writer's sensibility, to emerge as beautiful sausages bearing his peculiar mark—because no one else assuredly could extract so much from so little. The reader becomes lost in admiration—*he* could certainly never have got all this out of such material—and no one any more dares challenge what is assuredly—from the opening sentence of the author's journal, to his bogus Notes at the end—*Literature,* than he would dare dispute the authority of a New Critic.

It seems characteristic of what may really be wrong with England that "home" or "abroad" are today presented to us by alternatives so narrow and exclusive as Mr. Durrell's out-of-this-world Alexandria (and, of course, in criticizing Mr. Durrell I do so because I think his work is infinitely the best of its not infrequent kind), and Mr. John Osborne's lyrically, bitterly self-commiserating attic. For what is quite obvious about this country is that it is utterly committed to the outside world and that the real picture of the English situation today would have to take into account a great deal of "abroad." A good deal of the frustration in England comes, I suspect, from a feeling that, at the end of the war, we accomplished tremendous changes in our own house, only to discover that, at the very moment when we were doing this, the context in which we were living had suddenly enormously widened, producing conditions which made many of those changes almost irrelevant. Hence—as has, indeed, happened in other countries—socialism was accompanied by something like an attack of xenophobia. England created the Welfare State, but refused to take that lead in Europe which France, Italy, Greece, and even Germany were looking to us for. To insure ourselves in Europe would have been to threaten the precarious economic arrangements (based on the idea that every other nation must buy luxuries from England while she must import only necessities) on which English recovery and socialism depended. As a Labour party Minister explained to me at the time: "If we made a common market with the French we would have to import French cheeses and other things which are not necessities."

And now we have woken up to find ourselves engulfed by the wider context, with Germany the most prosperous country in Europe, and the prospect of England being forced into a common market under conditions which will make it extremely difficult for a future Labour government to maintain the level of the British workers' standard of living against that of poorer and harder working European workers. And beyond Europe and the Common Market, there lies Asia, and

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in Asia, and elsewhere, the conflict of Russia and America. If one viewed all these things in terms of old-style capitalist imperialist competition, the situation would indeed seem desperate. The only thing that saves us is the faith of economists that we are guided by the ghost of Maynard Keynes, like Blake's tempera painting of Nelson guiding the spiritual form of Leviathan.

With the nightmare of the wider world-context behind us, the English response to these things—trotting the Royal Family round the world, thousands of dog lovers protesting against Sputnik II—does look pretty silly. And the silliness can turn ugly when it is backed up by the British press, as the misrepresentation of Malcolm Muggeridge's article on the Royal Family, and the attempt to destroy his career, show. We are going through a period in which pins are being stuck into the bottoms of all the ostriches—royal, trades unionist, conservative, labor, complacent and angry—with their heads stuck in the sands. The trouble is that the pin-stickers have as narrow vision as the ostriches. Still, the present situation cannot last.

Stephen Spender

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PARIS LETTER

FRANCS AND RUBLES

The season began. The long summer vacation was finally over and life in Paris resumed. This time it was Françoise Sagan who, with the traditional three blows of the hammer, rang up the curtain. She had just published her third novel. Her publisher, Julliard, confident that there would be no letdown of the public favor that has consistently been extended to the most famous, if not the youngest, of his prize authors—not everyone can be a Minou Drouet and begin to write at the age of eight—issued a first printing of 200,000 copies. It appears that this was the number that were sold in advance.

I am not at all sure what the million readers that Françoise Sagan has accumulated with her first two books are hoping to find in this one. Everyone agrees that, good, bad or indifferent, her novels have been successful for reasons that are more sociological than literary in origin. Speaking for myself, I liked the first two. One could not avoid noticing numerous instances of maladroitness of style and thinking. But I felt that as a writer she had what, after all, matters most—a voice of her own. It is a voice that is both precious and grating to the nerves, therefore well-suited to express the revolt of our time, so well typified by that now famous but wholly fictitious character invented by our *chansonniers* and known under the name of Marie-Chantal.

In short, Françoise Sagan is in a way our Paul Morandelle, and expresses what, at every period of history, has been one of the characteristics of the spoiled, super-rich bourgeois youth during times of stress—a sort of ennui which, depending on their years, they counter either with high-sounding sentiments or the refusal to feel anything at all; that is to say, with their passions or with cynicism. Françoise Sagan's answer is the latter. But hers is a cynicism that is always well-bred, never excessive, done in monotone. Readers may put into it whatever they choose, and this is probably why there have been so many of them. The very adroitness and grace of her writing, too, are an invitation, even to the wary.

But it looks as if she has been in too great a hurry. Surely she was too quick to take the advice of her publisher, who never had any cause

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to worry about the *sale* of a Sagan, regardless of its worth. But it is apparent that this third novel, *Dans un mois, dans un an* (published in English as *Those Without Shadows*), has none of the qualities of the first two, however much it may resemble them in its defects.

The story concerns a dozen people more or less—all strictly middle-class and most of them very rich—who naturally are bored and are trying to find an escape from their boredom by the usual means—love, ambition, literary career. As a subject, it is no worse than any other; for that matter, is there such a thing as a *bad* subject in fiction? But Françoise Sagan has run into several obstacles, and is not able to hurdle any of them.

First there is the matter of style. Until now, she had always written a rather poetic prose, even though it may have struck one as being fairly facile. But it is possible to write poetically about bourgeois youth on one condition, and one only: that you yourself are one of them and that you stick to yourself as a subject. For there are endless poetic possibilities in writing about oneself. The moment that Françoise Sagan decided not to write about herself any more, but rather about those people who always have a hundred thousand francs in their hand—the hand that isn't holding the cocktail—all poetry vanished. What remained was a desert. Instantly, we are struck with the banalities, the signs of ineptness, all of which have been there from the start but had been overlooked in our admiration for the writer's grace. Take a sentence like this one, which we find it hard to forgive: "The basement cabaret where she had danced in her student days had become a tourist hideout." It is almost a *tour de force* to assemble so many clichés in so small a space, and still say so little. Unfortunately, it is a *tour de force* that one finds on every page, almost in every line.

Having arrived at this decision—not to write about herself—Françoise Sagan must have become aware almost at once that it was not going to be easy. For she must write about someone, and it would have to be about other people. She would then be obliged to create character—and here again she came to grief. Indeed, in order to write about people who do nothing, think nothing and bear no particular distinguishing mark, one has to be an observer—an angry one or a well-disposed one, but an observer. But one constantly has the feeling that Françoise Sagan is incapable of judging the people she talks about, for the reason that they are the very people she has lived among since the day she was born, whom she has seen every day of her life, and still does. Being unable to make her characters act in any significant way—to her everything they do is commonplace because their behavior is part and parcel

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of her own life—she determines to attempt to define them. And so each one is put into a pigeonhole: one is an overambitious woman, another lacks intelligence and is in love with her husband; among the men, one is dubbed an unsuccessful writer, another a middle-aged cynic. Her characters remain silhouettes; and what is worse, nothing ever happens to them.

It is now possible to analyze the strange phenomenon that constitutes the success of Françoise Sagan. Can it be laid to the quality of her books? If not, then how explain it? We may perhaps learn the answer when we examine the publishing figures of *Dans un mois, dans un an* some months hence. If this book reaches the 500,000 mark, then the literary critics will definitely have to withdraw in favor of the public opinion experts.

One thing is certain, however; it is not a novel that will shock anyone. Françoise Sagan is no longer eighteen. Few now would question her right to talk about men and women in bed. What shocked moralistic people was not that she talked about these matters too baldly but at an age, it would seem, when one should remain silent about them. This time the devotees of literary scandal will be disappointed.

But if they look around they will find cause for indignation elsewhere, though of a quite different kind. Actually, is it so very different? This is the story. Early in the summer, a young writer, Jacques Lanzmann, who had previously published a novel or two of mildly humorous intent, brought out a book entitled *Cuir de Russie* (*Russian Leather*). It was little more than an account of a cruise that included stops in Greece, Turkey, and, lastly, in the Crimea. And what, precisely, did Jacques Lanzmann see in the Crimea? Nothing out of the ordinary, really: people, most of them on vacation and finding it tedious; cities, such as one finds everywhere, with some rich neighborhoods and some poor ones. All the same, he did meet some Armenians who regretted having left France for a Socialist country, and who were counting on Mr. Pineau, who had shown such understanding when he was in the USSR on his trip, to help them get back into France. But actually, Jacques Lanzmann, whose curiosity does not always run to intellectual matters, and because he didn't think he could find out a great deal about Russia, anyway, in just a week, decided that he would avoid generalities and give a first-hand report on some facet of Russian life. And so, looking around for a subject during one of his stops in the Crimea, he found a Russian prostitute, made love to her, and for the same price (twenty rubles) was allowed to get drunk. The girl was neither good-

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looking nor clean, but we conclude that our author didn't mind, since he has told us about it at length. The book was published, and Mr. Lanzmann was expelled from the Communist party. This young innocent had been a card-carrying member. He was also dismissed from his position as dramatic critic for *Les Lettres Françaises.*

I imagine that the most serious charge made against him was not that he had disclosed that some people in Russia live poorly, or that Russians get bored while on vacation. Nor was it that he mentioned the Armenians, whose predicament was already well-known to everyone here. But a prostitute who would sell herself for twenty rubles? That was going too far!

It was going so far, in fact, that Jacques Lanzmann was attacked not only by the Communists, but by some who themselves had been expelled from the party. Claude Roy, who lost his membership because of his protest against the Budapest massacres, wrote an article in the leftist *Libération* in which he was even more outspoken than usual. "I know," he said, "that gravity is often the mask of a fool. There are some subjects, however, that do not lend themselves to clowning and caricature. This is such a one. The result is that a good writer has given us a bad book." Subjects that do not lend themselves to a light approach are, naturally, those that have to do with Soviet Russia. Obviously, where Russia is concerned, humor cannot be permitted; neither can the amorality of which Jacques Lanzmann has given such a lamentable example.

Speaking of clowning, the best part of this story is the sequel. This frequenter of working-class brothels, this onetime Communist dramatic critic lost no time in finding himself another job: writing under an assumed name, he is now society editor of *L'Express.* It must be said that his column is somewhat on the acrid side; doubtless he was hired more for his wit than for his wide acquaintance among members of Parisian high society.

But to return to Claude Roy's sudden fit of righteous indignation about the somber revelations of his old comrade, this must be seen as a new aspect of the attitude which some intellectuals are now taking toward the Communist party. In the past, there were Communist intellectuals and ex-Communist intellectuals. The ex-Communists, though they allowed themselves no excessive display of bitterness about their former associations, did behave like blind men able to see again. These ex-prisoners found the fresh air of freedom exhilarating. And even now we get some of these. A case in point is the moving document by Louis de Villefosse appearing in the current number of *Preuves,* in which

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he recounts the various stages by which he broke with the Communist monthly *Europe*. But at the same time we also have the nostalgic ones, who lose their bearings in the heady air of freedom and dream of getting back inside the four walls of orthodoxy. Such a one is Claude Roy. In an article in *Le Monde* on the situation of the intellectual who finds himself at odds with the party leadership, he speaks of the "non-antagonistic contradiction" which separates him from Maurice Thorez. This contradiction, you will recall, grew out of the Hungarian Revolution, and the disagreement among leftist intellectuals as to its causes and goals. It was in this connection, as Claude Roy reminds us, that Maurice Thorez wrote ("with a tinge of sadness that seemed to me sincere," he adds) that "the events in Hungary may have caused confusion in the thinking of some of the weaker elements among the advanced intellectuals." It would seem that Claude Roy, one of these weaker elements, is trying to strengthen himself. By courageously condemning the trifling anecdotes of Jacques Lanzmann he has given proof of a loyalty for which no doubt he hopes he will be suitably recompensed.

In this he is mistaken. He will be expected not only to do more but better. As a model he should take the one "advanced intellectual" whose weaknesses are always certain to be but passing ones—to wit, Louis Aragon. Aragon went so far as to petition President Kadar to grant a pardon to the two Hungarian writers, Gali and Obresowski, who were sentenced to die. As of now, he regrets having showed such weakness and has conveyed as much to a special envoy of a Hungarian newspaper. His conscience troubles him. "The writers and poets, and some of the more level-headed younger elements in France have now grasped the meaning of the events that took place in Budapest last October. These writers and poets and young intellectuals know now that the rebellion was clearly anti-revolutionary in character." Since Louis Aragon had never expressed the slightest doubt that such was not the case, even at the time of the worst Soviet repression, obviously no one expected him to come forward now with such platonic remarks as these. But that is not all. "I regret," he told the Hungarian journalist, "that I interceded in behalf of the writers Gali and Obresowski, sentenced to die by a people's tribunal." And so Louis Aragon has left nothing undone to lessen the "non-antagonistic contradiction" which separates him, not from his own party, which he has never left, but from one of the most illustrious representatives of this party, the Honorable Mr. Kadar, President of Hungary.

Jean Bloch-Michel

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THEATER CHRONICLE

"ISN'T LIFE A TERRIBLE THING, THANK GOD"

Dylan Thomas's radio play, *Under Milk Wood,* sometimes sounds like a liquefied Welsh version of Joyce's Dublin Nighttown, with the tears flowing freely and the laughter running over. All of Joyce's buried sentiment, all his wry ultimate acquiescence in the lifeness of life, briskly surfaces in *Under Milk Wood,* disports itself in shameless abandon, and cries with Polly Garter, the town fancy-woman of the play, "Oh, isn't life a terrible thing, thank God." No anomalies or contradictions in this Welsh dream-village, no heartbroken mothers, spoiled priests or wandering Jews. Where Joyce and his generation had been intense, haunted and hard-working, Thomas was sportive, protean, defiantly untragic. He was Glendower to their Hotspur and could call spirits from the vasty deep by simply raising his voice. If they had strained, he relaxed; though he did so in a medium of language and fancy which they had helped to renew—as it were, for his pleasure. He made a playground of their time-defying and nature-resistant monuments of the literary art, climbing all over their obdurate surfaces and cheerfully defiling them. He was the artist as a young dog, as the title of his volume of autobiographic sketches made clear.

In its writing, *Under Milk Wood* is sometimes slavishly Joycean. "From Benyon Butchers in Coronation Street, the smell of fried liver sidles out with onions on its breath. And listen! In the dark breakfast-room behind the shop, Mr. and Mrs. Benyon, waited upon by their treasure, enjoy, between bites, their everymorning hullabaloo, and Mrs. Benyon slips the gristly bits under the tasseled tablecloth to her fat cat." (I quote from the version of the play that appeared in *Mademoiselle,* February, 1954.) Yet *Under Milk Wood* has its clear originality as a whole. This consists not only in the broader humor of "liver with onions on its breath" and similar flights, but in the charmed case with which the potential anomalies of existence are turned into jests: Mr. Pugh the would-be wife-poisoner; Mrs. Ogmore-Pritchard with her two husbands, both of them dead; Mrs. Willy-Nilly the postman's wife, "full of tea to her double-chinned brim . . . and always ready to steam open the mail." Then there is the radical loosening of Joyce's austere form, the

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musical interweaving of the many voices, which transform the sleeping inhabitants of Thomas's Welsh village into pure spirit.

Performed by disembodied voices on radio or records, *Under Milk Wood* is all that it sets out to be. The spirits do really come at the poet's call, the act of levitation takes place before the mind's eye. But to stage the work in the regular way is to risk arousing the Hotspur in a spectator. This an English company recently did in a production of *Under Milk Wood* imported from London to Henry Miller's Theatre in New York. Some fifty players bounced, gestured and hallooed their way through the text, each of them determined to make the most of the brief moments allotted him on the stage. In their efforts to look evanescent, they merely succeeded in falling over one another on a set which, with its numerous levels and compartments, seemed a cruel trap. It was pretty clearly a case of over-acting all around. There were, however, enough vivid passages to suggest that, with a more restrained cast, the staging of *Under Milk Wood* in the regular way is not impossible. As it was, the London production brought out the least endearing aspects of the play. Its vapors tended to collect, settle and condense into clichés.

Dylan Thomas was also the subject of *A Boy Growing Up,* a series of readings from Thomas's autobiographical sketches. This performance, devised and carried out by Emlyn Williams, was justly called an "entertainment." Where the cast of *Under Milk Wood* largely failed, Mr. Williams abundantly succeeded, with only his single voice and no properties to speak of and a minimum of bodily motions. But he is a genius in this line, able to impersonate a dozen characters at a time and conjure up entire physical scenes out of the air. The very frailty of the original sketches served him, encouraging him to draw on his own rich resources of humor and imagination.

Poetry seems to remain Britain's most dependable literary export, for Dylan Thomas has had a greater reputation and influence in this country than any other British-born writer since Auden. The novelists and playwrights of that country get only a passing celebrity here, despite the eagerness of many Americans to enjoy and learn from them. The women come and go talking of C. P. Snow—or Henry Green or Graham Greene or Christopher Fry—but not for long. Recent English novelists and playwrights have usually failed to establish themselves where establishment in the long run counts—with mature writers of the first order. Perhaps Kingsley Amis, John Wain, John Osborne and others of the English younger generation will prove more infectious.

Osborne's play, *Look Back in Anger,* while it is notoriously of this

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school, seems inferior of its kind to Amis's novel, *Lucky Jim*. Amis's inventiveness in the department of action is not shared by Osborne. What Osborne gives us is a full-length portrait, deeply ambiguous in its implications, of a man raging in the abstract dark of his largely self-spun universe. *Look Back in Anger* is nevertheless worth contemplating, especially in the excellent production it is getting in New York, where the original London cast of dedicated players is mostly present. To judge by the text of the play (published in the U. S. by Criterion Books, $2.75), no concessions have been made to Broadway. Song and dance have not been added, nor have Osborne's lines been tampered with, except perhaps to de-expurgate them for the tougher New York audience. Where the text refers to "a matelot's arm," an actor in the stage version was distinctly heard to say "a sailor's ass." It doesn't matter. Text and performance both have Osborne's bottom-dog humor in quantity; and like the play of which it is so important a part, the humor is sometimes genuine, sometimes *voulu* and awful.

While the New York critics were generally friendly to *Look Back in Anger,* they did in some cases object that the hero's anger is insufficiently motivated. It is; Jimmy Porter, as he is called, is that somewhat depressing figure with which certain movies and novels, as well as certain young writers who contribute to symposia on the problems of their generation, have made us familiar: the rebel without a cause. This figure seems more inspired in his English incarnation. Having wit and rhetoric Jimmy makes something, dramatically speaking, of his baseless revolt, his career of gratuitous inaction. For his wit and rhetoric, moreover, he draws on a long line of British moral bullies and prophets, from Hamlet to more recent examples. Politically impotent though he is, Jimmy Porter can at least blow his trumpet and scan the newspapers for gratifying instances of scandal and fatuity. Mainly, he is free to abuse his wife, her family, her social class, her England. Porter is of working-class origins while Alison, his wife, belongs to the upper sections of society. As his "hostage"—her word for it—she helplessly submits to his accusing tirades. *He* knows things undreamt of in *her* philosophy; *he* has seen, as *she* hasn't, men suffer and die; in short, he's spiritually alive and *she's* spiritually dead. Porter is a sort of Hamlet who has read the Communist Manifesto, *Man and Superman* and *The Plumed Serpent*. He has Labour Party posters on his wall but doesn't really envisage a changed social order. Failing this, he makes a blood sacrifice of his wife—all his fantasies are of blood-letting. The trouble, as he sees it, is with his class enemies even more than with himself. They are all empty do-nothings like his wife, whom he calls "the Lady Pusillanimous,"

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and do not even put up a fight. Jimmy rails, Alison quails; and between them they enact an endless ritual of mutual damnation in their dreary Midlands flat. For them it is always Sunday on the calendar just as it is always a season of oppressive idleness in the mind. Their windows open on a covered areaway; their door gives on a hall, a much-used bathroom and a landlady who may throw them out at any moment. The furnishings look provisional, as if waiting for the landlady's ire or a bomb to finish them. A couple of friends share the Porters' lives for a while without in the long run loosening their mortal embrace. Amid all that is insubstantial in their lives, this grim association alone persists. Meanwhile Jimmy finds his ideal opponent in his mother-in-law, who never appears in the play. On her imagined presence, embodied in a gas burner downstage, he lavishes his finest flights of abuse, drawing enthusiastically on Hamlet's wit of worms and corpses. Jimmy Porter, it should be added, is often a detestable character from any point of view, including—at moments—the author's. With all its monotony of structure, its false starts into domestic melodrama or screwball comedy, *Look Back in Anger* has the courage of its author's talent for relentless portraiture. There's nothing wrong with Jimmy Porter that a good revolution wouldn't cure, if a good revolution were conceivable by him or anyone else connected with the play. Nor is anything amiss with *Look Back in Anger* that a small upheaval in Osborne's stagecraft wouldn't put to rights. This, at least, is a possibility.

The play version of *Look Homeward, Angel* is an outstanding example of the familiar process by which a formally dated subject is periodized, as it were, and so made interesting once more. Thomas Wolfe's novel takes us back to a time when the modern movement in the arts was young; when art was created by large-scale, widely acclaimed, often self-advertising geniuses; and when genius, in order to realize itself, had to revolt violently from the village, the family and the other conditions of existence. In its original form *Look Homeward, Angel* (1929) was the last ambitious treatment of a subject which Dreiser, O'Neill and Anderson—to mention only the leading American examples—had initiated at an earlier time; and Wolfe's novel perhaps revealed its belatedness in the conscious literariness of its style and the gargantuan exaggeration with which the theme was handled. The Broadway version of the novel probably owes its inception to the remarkable success of O'Neill's posthumous *Long Day's Journey into Night,* a starker presentation of embattled youthful genius in an earlier America. In the New York theater, where trends so often substitute for traditions, the

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triumph of these two productions may mean, as I have suggested, only the successful discovery of a new "period." Yet there is no doubt that both plays help to appease a certain hunger in audiences, not merely for the American past, but for an atmosphere of real hardship, real revolt, and real genius.

Ketti Frings's adaptation of *Look Homeward, Angel* is honest and skillful, telescoping the many events of the novel into an intelligible action of a few weeks' duration. Eugene Gant's growing rebellion against his mother and her boarding-house empire forms the main line of development; while his father's histrionic quasi-rebellion and his brother Ben's failure and death provide variations, farcical and pathetic, on the same theme. Wolfe's wilder humors are given occasional expression in the ravings of the elder Gants, as well as in the boarding-house setting designed by Jo Mielziner: a fantastic creation of towering cupolas and far-flung roofs and porches, which manages to look both solid and ghostly. A great deal is also contributed to the present production by the really formidable acting of Hugh Griffith and Jo Van Fleet as Mr. and Mrs. Gant, and by that of Anthony Perkins as Eugene Gant. The fact that Perkins is a very slim, elegant and spiritualized Eugene (or Wolfe) seems almost essential to this whole retrospective enterprise, adding a certain dimension to the character, giving it distance, making it slightly ghostly too. It is with a refined nostalgia, rather than in anger, that the play version of Wolfe's novel looks back upon the great American *geniezeit*.

F. W. Dupee

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Nicola Chiaromonte

PASTERNAK'S MESSAGE

Here is Russia, once again speaking out freely. That is the feeling one gets from the very first pages of *Dr. Zivagho,* a feeling which is confirmed as one continues to read, becoming so strong that at the end one shuts the book with an emotion not far from reverence.

In the second introductory lesson to his great course in Russian history, Kliucevski used to deny that cultural and artistic manifestations could in themselves assume the character of historical events. "Insofar as it is just an idea," he would say,

it remains personal élan, poetic ideal, scientific discovery. An idea becomes an historic factor only when it possesses itself of some practical force or power, either in the form of a popular mass or of capital, which then transforms it into laws, institutions, industrial or other enterprises, and custom, that is, proposes it to the general admiration by making it a work of art available to all: as when, for example, the pious image of Heaven is moulded into the shape of the dome of the cathedral of Saint Sophia.

So, first of all, Boris Pasternak's novel "proposes to the general admiration" this event: a Russian writer has resumed his freedom of speech in order to make "available to all" what he thinks of the history lived through and suffered by his people during the last forty years. His is obviously an act which has ripened for a long time in silence and solitude and which would have been impossible if Pasternak was not sure of testifying as much for the others as for himself, and, even more, of having reached just the right moment when one could no longer do without such testimony. His novel, which we now have because it was, in effect, smuggled out of Russia, tells us, quite simply, this news: after so much turmoil, so much pain and terror, so much inhuman violence—the sense of truth, the love of life, even the feeling of hope, and, finally, as firm and unshaken as in Pushkin's day, the faith in literary communication, have remained intact in the spirit of a Russian writer. This is indeed an historic event.

Pasternak attaches a great importance to this novel. To the editor

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of a Uruguayan magazine who expressed admiration for his poetry, he recently replied in these words:

They are only trifles. I have the feeling that an epoch with absolutely new tasks, both of the heart and human dignity—a silent epoch which will never be proclaimed or promulgated in a loud voice—has come to birth and grows day by day without our being aware of it. Fragmentary, personal poems are hardly suited to meditating on such obscure, new and solemn events. Only prose and philosophy can attempt to deal with them. For this reason, the most important thing which I have until now succeeded in doing in my life is the novel *Dr. Zivagho*. . . . I am disturbed by the very sad circumstance which gives me an exaggerated fame on the basis of my first writings, whereas nobody knows my recent work (above all, my novel), work which has an entirely different significance.

To move out of the "fragmentary" and the "personal," to dominate his lyrical impulse in order to render the sense of human experience, this is evidently what Pasternak has tried to do in his novel. It is, in substance, a meditation on history, that is, on the infinite distance which separates the human conscience from the violence of history and permits a man to remain a man, to rediscover the track of truth that the whirlwind of events continually cancels and confuses. One might say that all of *Dr. Zivagho* is dedicated to a description of this distance, and to the insistent representation of the truth manifested in it.

The novel tells the story and meditates on the odyssey of one man (a doctor who is also a poet, but, above all, a man irremovably thoughtful and sensitive) through forty years of Russian history, from 1903, when the protagonist is barely a boy in Czarist Russia, to 1929, when, having lost his family, the woman he loves and his friends, he is killed by a heart attack on the street in the midst of a crowd in Stalin's Moscow. But in the Epilogue and the Conclusion, the novel arrives at the last war and 1945, when the memory of Zivagho, handed down to them in a small notebook of his prose and poetry, is revived in the minds of his two old friends and his experience flows into theirs, illuminated by the light of hope.

Anyone looking for adventures, the interweaving of plots, the imprint of historical events will find all these in this novel. There are the peaceful years before 1905, the Socialist and libertarian fervor, the revolution of 1905, the war of 1914, the February days of 1917, the October *coup d'etat,* the civil war from the Ukraine to Siberia, famine, plague, massacres, the terroristic fury of the Cheka, the consolidation of Bolshevik power, the spreading of silence and fear; there are the intellectuals, the peasants, the workers, soldiers, Red and White Com-

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missars; there are the steppes, the forests, the rivers of Russia; family life, friendship, adolescence, youth, maturity; and there is a love story, told with a truly Russian purity and seriousness. Since *War and Peace,* there has not been a novel which has embraced so vast and dense a period of history. Indeed, though described in a much different manner, the characters and events in Pasternak are even more numerous than in Tolstoy.

But the tumult, the wealth and grandiosity of events are certainly not the essential matter in *Dr. Zivagho.* And even less the depiction of solid, well-founded characters, the joy of describing life and making it palpitate which fills Tolstoy with such exuberance. In Pasternak, there are on one side the events and the vicissitudes of the individual characters, on the other—as a constant counterpoint—a certain ecstasy of the spirit outside of the immediate reality, an ecstasy found in the vision of universal life and in the effort to understand in human terms that which is happening. There is, more than a religious, a mystical feeling for nature, a powerful and proud "yes" said to life, despite everything. But there is not a single smile, nor a single moment of joy, save for the joy of freedom during the first days of the revolution, and this is an impersonal rapture more than a true joy. The events are narrated in every detail, with bare simplicity; but they seem far-off and muffled, plunged in a kind of twilight; terrible as they are, they occur and pass away in a sort of strange silence and tranquillity, almost as though even their terror cannot disturb that which exists at the bottom of things and of the human spirit. As a result, they give us the feeling of memories which rise to the surface of consciousness, sharp yet insubstantial: shadows which ask to be placated by understanding. And they are shadows which also are characters: almost pure names, with nothing physical about them. What one is told about them is solely the part they play in each other's lives, the way in which they are twisted and beaten by the storm, a few of the essential expressions of their spirit, a few of their thoughts and judgments. Their existences are so disordered and torn to pieces that nothing is left to them (and, in particular, to the protagonist) but the pure distance of the spirit from circumstances, the meditative solitude in which they endure the raging of destiny. At the end, we know that all that has been told was told so as to describe this distance and this solitude: Doctor Zivagho's conscience and how it managed, by resisting death, to remain human.

From another viewpoint, however, Pasternak's book is an historical novel in the full, even Tolstoyan sense of the word: a re-evocation of the tragedy of Russia which has been written not only to rescue it

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from the "non-truth" of the official truth ("the diabolical power of the dead letter," says Pasternak), but also from the dull opacity of resentment and hate. At every point the novel draws its life from the will to oppose the true story of individuals to History as it is made, by force and chance, on the world's stage. In fact the great Russian novelists have never separated the story of the individual from that of his society, from that immense *persona* which Russia is for them. And it is in this way that Pasternak has certainly wished to "continue" Tolstoy—the Tolstoy whom he venerates—by telling the truth about Russian history and proclaiming that, no matter who is entrusted with the material power, the power over consciences belongs to him who knows how to make himself its instrument and voice.

"I am here so as to try to understand the terrible beauty of the world and to know the names of things, and if my forces do not suffice, to generate children who will do it in my place." Thus thinks the young woman Lara at the beginning of the novel, when she feels she has finally freed herself from the weakness which has made her the slave of a seducer. And her resoluteness has its correspondence in Juri Zivagho's virile pride:

Now he feared nothing, neither life nor death; instead everything, all the things of the world, were part of his vocabulary. He felt himself on a footing of equality with the universe and he listened to the funeral ceremony for Anna Ivanova in a completely different way from that which, when she had died, he had listened to his mother's. At that time he had felt that he was dying of the pain, he had been afraid and had prayed. Now he listened to the ceremony as to a communication which addressed him directly and intimately concerned him. He listened to the words and demanded a clear meaning from them, such as one demands from anything, and there was nothing in common with devoutness in the emotion he felt of dependence on the supreme forces of earth and heaven, to which he bowed as to his true progenitors.

Armed with such inner certainties—with such "revelations," one might say—these individuals go to meet their fates; in fact the novel amounts to nothing else but the story of how pride of this sort resists disorder and violence, of how man cannot be humiliated by anybody but himself.

The revolution, justice on earth, man liberated from the superfluous which "besmears" him and thus rendered equal to man—all this is what people such as Lara and Zivagho look forward to. When it arrives, this is how they welcome it: "There is truly something morbid in the life of the rich. An infinity of useless things. Useless furniture and rooms in their houses, useless delicacies of feeling, useless expres-

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sions." And, again: "No sooner had the mass of the humble revolted and the advantages of the elite been abolished, how quickly then did everyone become stale and faded, how soon they laid aside without regret their original ideas, which they obviously had never had!" When, in the Moscow of 1917, Juri Zivagho brings home a duck and his family enjoys this unheard-of luxury, they are filled by a feeling of guilt.

> The evening seemed to them a betrayal. . . . Outside the window spread Moscow, dark, mute and hungry. . . . They understood then that only a life similar to the life of the people who surrounded them, a life which immerses itself in life without leaving a trace, is a true life, that solitary happiness is not happiness.

It is because his spirit is so open and so disposed to accept not only what is just but all that takes place, and to evaluate it for what it means, that Zivagho, hearing about Lenin's *coup d'etat,* can exclaim: "From the manner in which this act has been carried out to the end, without the slightest hesitation, there is something of our national tradition, something ancestral and familiar. Something of Pushkin's absolute light, of Tolstoy's direct faithfulness to the concrete."

But it is just this generous impartiality that gives Juri Zivagho the right to judge and, confronted by the newly established power, to say:

> Everything has its measure, Larisa Fedorovna. In this in-between period it was necessary to achieve something. Instead, it seems clear that, for the inspirers of the revolution, the marasmus of upheavals and transformations is their natural element. They do not live on bread, they require something which at least equals the whole terrestial globe. The construction of new worlds, the period of transition is their goal, a goal in itself. They haven't learned anything else, they don't know how to do anything else. And do you know where the restlessness of this continual changing of theirs comes from? From the lack of definite abilities, talent. Man is born to live, not to prepare himself for life.

On the other hand, such judgments would not carry the weight of conviction they do if they did not well up from so vast and joyous a feeling for nature and the communion of all living beings, to which Pasternak continually brings back his characters: on the earth is the chaos caused by men, one endures it as inevitable and perhaps even just, but, lo! a cloud forms in the sky, a cow moos, the ice melts in the spring, and everything that happens on earth is transfigured, its burden of pain infinitely lightened, the great certainty which lies at the bottom of the human heart infinitely confirmed.

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Such scenes, such spectacles (those of the hallucinatory march of Partisans across the Siberian steppes) gave the impression of something transcendental, of another world. They appeared to be fragments of an unknown existence, of other planets, transported by error on to the earth. Only nature remained faithful to history and revealed itself to the eye as the artists of the modern age had depicted it.

If there is a mysticism of nature in Pasternak (and it is in the light of this mysticism that his Christianity should be interpreted), there is also, as a direct emanation of it, a mysticism of artistic creation.

After two or three stanzas composed in a rush and a few similes which almost surprised him, the work took possession of him and he felt the approach of that which he called inspiration. In such cases the ensemble of forces that preside over creation seems to gain the upper hand. The chief role no longer is the author's nor the state of his spirit, which he is trying to render, but rather is taken over by the very language with which he wants to express it. The language . . . begins to think by itself, to speak and become totally music, not in the sense of pure phonetic resonance, but as the consequentiality and rhythm of one's inner flow. . . . At such moments Juri Andréevic felt that it was not he who did the essential work but something greater than himself: the situation of thought and poetry in the world. . . . He was only an occasion and a point of support. . . .

It is while he is composing poetry that Zivagho happens to reflect on history:

He realized once again that he did not know how to conceive of history . . . that it presented itself to his thought like the unfolding of life in the vegetable world. In the winter, beneath the snow, the stripped branches of a deciduous wood are thin and miserable as the hairs in an old man's wen. In the spring, the wood is transformed in a few days. . . . During this transformation the wood moves with a speed that surpasses that of the animals, for animals do not grow as quickly as plants. And yet this is the sort of movement nobody can observe. The wood does not move, we can't catch it in the act, or hide in such a way as to surprise it. We always find it immobile. And in this very immobility we rediscover the life of society, history, which also eternally moves, eternally changes. . . . Tolstoy . . . thought of it in just this way, but he has not expressed it with sufficient clarity. Nobody makes history, one cannot see history, just as one cannot see the growing of the grass. . . .

The capacity to give himself to life, to generously obey its rhythm—this is the true measure of a man. It is not enough that a person carries out his function perfectly, like the revolutionist Strelnikov, the perfect image of the resolute, intelligent man.

His thoughts had an extreme clarity and equilibrium. He possessed to a rare degree the sense of justice and honesty, nobility and elevation

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of spirit. . . . But his intelligence lacked the gift of the fortuitous, that power which, by unforeseen discoveries, violates the sterile harmony of the foreseeable. By this same token, if he were really to do good, the consistency of his principles lacked the inconsistency of the heart. . . .

Pasternak certainly does not hesitate to make his hero say what he thinks of Bolshevik power and its "non-truth." But perhaps his essential judgment on what happened to Russian society under the new regime is summed up in these few words: "They had changed their habits, having by now accepted the revolution, and they said 'That's the way it is,' instead of saying 'Yes' or 'It's right.' "

Naturally, so serene and solemn a thought as that expressed in this novel implies that a man has reached that state of inner conviction for which there is no other adjective but "religious." The final point of Pasternak's vision is the message of Christ, and what Christ means to him is absolute faith in man's innerness and freedom:

You do not understand that one can be an atheist, not even know if God exists or for what, and yet at the same time know that man does not live in nature but in history and that . . . history has been established by Christ and the Gospels are its foundation. But what is history? It is to begin the century-long work so as to succeed little by little to solve the mystery of death and in the future to overcome it. . . . For discoveries of this kind one needs spiritual equipment, and in this sense all the data has already been given to us by the Gospels. . . . First of all, love for one's neighbor, that supreme form of living energy. . . . And then, the essential reasons of the man of today, without which he would be unthinkable, namely, the ideals of free individuality and of life regarded as sacrifice. . . .

And, further on:

If the beast which sleeps in man could be held down by the threat of punishment, it doesn't matter what punishment, or with a reward after death, the highest emblem of humanity would be the lion tamer in the circus with his whip, not the prophet who has sacrificed himself. But this is the point: for centuries not the cudgel but simply an inner music has placed man above the beast . . . the irresistible power of disarmed truth, the attractive power of the example.

And, in a singularly symbolic discourse, put in the mouth of an inspired, prophetic woman: "The Gospels, which counterpose the Sabbath to the ordinary days of the week, intends, despite all kinds of coercion, to edify life."

To read these passages as though they were the novel's ultimate message, indeed its logical conclusion, would be to falsify them. They are the élan of its spirit and should be understood as such. Tolstoyan

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and Dostoevskian motifs, and also not a little of Chestov and Berdaeyev, come together in Pasternak's Christianity. Yet, in the over-all equilibrium of the work, it is certainly the Tolstoyan inspiration that predominates, particularly in the expression of the religious emotion of the individual's dependence on the life of the cosmos and the noble pride that comes from this dependence.

In any case, what matters are not the "solutions" proposed by Pasternak. What matters and what moves us most deeply are the questions. It is to see arise today, out of the thick of history, when it seemed that history itself had suppressed them forever, the great Russian questions expounded by a living Russian writer, the questions about man, about life, about good and evil. The "accursed questions," as the Russians of the last century called them, and he who speaks for the others—the writer—must know how to confront them, must run the risk of "damnation."

In Boris Pasternak's poetry one can read this quatrain:

Related to all that which exists, deciding
To meet the future in the life of everyday
At the end one cannot help but incur, as in a heresy,
An incredible simplicity.

The son, like Alexander Blok, of "Russia's terrible years," Pasternak has wholeheartedly incurred this heresy. Confronted by the great event which his book represents, one is inclined to repeat what he himself has said about the October revolution: "Something ancestral and familiar. Something of Pushkin's absolute light, of Tolstoy's direct faithfulness to the concrete." It is a book born out of the depths of pain and love, nourished at the very roots of human liberty. And the presage of freedom on which it majestically ends is only its final harmony.

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BOOKS

OLD REVOLUTIONISTS

MEMOIRS OF A REVOLUTIONIST. By Dwight Macdonald. Farrar, Straus and Cudahy. $4.75.

Dwight Macdonald's one-man magazine, *Politics,* meant a good deal to me during its brief lifetime (1944-1949), and for years I have stubbornly held on to certain back issues because of an inarticulated feeling that here, at least, was a sign that radical intellectuals were not always so empty, so nationalistic and so obsessed as many of them have come to be. I was not only in sympathy with Macdonald's unashamedly ethical attacks on political realism, on the "science" of Marxism, on the falseness as well as the stupidity of the liberal weeklies and the "progressive"-New Deal front, but I was grateful above all for the continuing astringency of his notes on the American scene. Unlike so many ex-radicals, who seemed to have given up everything in Marxism except its cocksureness, Macdonald not only kept up his irritable alertness to all that was becoming increasingly stultifying in American culture, but he wrote like a man who was honestly trying to understand a world that had outrun the expectations of *all* social "science."

Politics, from my point of view, was a refreshing contrast to the petty egotism and dogmatism of those intellectuals who had grown up inside the radical movement. Macdonald's capacity for dissent from the majority point of view, his almost physical resistance to war slogans, made him oppose particularly the liberals' indictment of Germany as a whole, the silly conceit and even sillier optimism of the New Dealers as world regulators. In addition to this, he had the humility to present to his readers, who certainly needed some fresh ideas, the insights of European witnesses (and victims) of totalitarianism: Simone Weil, Bruno Bettelheim, Nicola Chiaromonte, Victor Serge, Albert Camus. Despite the hysteria of certain contributors and the sometimes intrusive personal moodiness of the editor, the magazine gave one the feeling, in those critical war years and after, that *Politics* signalized and encouraged a definite effort to think one's way back to the humanism, the experimentalism and the universalism of pre-Marxist and anti-Marxist socialisms.

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Yet with all this, there is some question in my mind as to just what purpose a collection of Macdonald's back pieces can serve right now. Much of the excitement of *Politics* consisted in its European connow. Much of the excitement of *Politics* consisted in its European contributors. *Memoirs of a Revolutionist* is not a systematic study the kind of memoir that Edmund Wilson likes to do, where the center of interest is not so much in the period as in its confrontation by a wholly literary imagination. Macdonald is neither an historian nor a theoretician; he is essentially a cultural critic, a born "magazinist," as he describes himself, who cannot write a book in cold blood, but who is stimulated by a speech, a slogan, a book, to do quick slashing analyses of the issues it raises. Unfortunately, many of these issues no longer seem very real ten years later—at least not in the wholly polemical terms in which Macdonald likes to attack them. Macdonald's chief concern during the war period is epitomized by his section on "The Responsibility Of Peoples" (the original title of this book); he fought constantly against war-time hysteria and the idea of "total" German guilt. In 1943-45, it took some courage and independence—if not necessarily a knowledge of Germany—to take this position. But Macdonald's irritability on this question has, for obvious reasons, no great relevance at a time when the (West) Germans are the richest and smuggest people in Europe today, and when it takes real courage to insist that the Germans were responsible at all for the unspeakable mass murders of civilian populations.

If we take the book as cultural criticism—as an example of the kind of literature made famous in this country by Mencken—the book may seem to justify itself in the way that old volumes of Mencken's *Prejudices* do. General Patton's pearl-handled revolvers are about as interesting just now as the antics of William Jennings Bryan, but Macdonald on Patton is lively and vitriolic in the style of Mencken on Bryan. Although Macdonald's often solitary fight against the "war idols" made one think of Randolph Bourne, Macdonald's best work is always negative and slashingly critical, like Mencken's. Like Mencken, Macdonald has instinctive sense of the phoniness and absurdity on the American scene, and he can always spot cultural pretension. It is a pity, in this connection, that he did not include in this book his memorable *New Yorker* attack on Mortimer Adler and the "Great Books" syntopicon. Macdonald there illustrated a kind of cultural criticism that is rarely done in this country, for we have so few people who combine any kind of cultivation with real freedom of manner. But despite this alertness to the inflated and the absurd, Macdonald is not very

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much like Mencken. For Mencken was not only a nimble satirist and a very funny writer, but he was detached, cold as ice, brutally smug. Macdonald is writing here about events and ideas in which he was passionately implicated up to the limits of his capacity, and he gets angry and abusive in a way that Mencken never could.

In the end, then, the book has to be read as the autobiography of an idea—it belongs with those memoirs of the Marxist left which in American writing correspond to memoirs of the early Progressive period. It takes its place on the shelf with the memoirs of other old revolutionists; it has the immediate quaintness of material to which the author himself looks back with incredulity, as who should say—Was *I* there, in Paterson, in Passaic, at the time of the great strike? Was it really *I* who wrote that pamphlet appealing to the workers and peasants of the Bronx?

It is this extraordinary and unexpected irrelevance of the "radical" experience that is so striking in Macdonald's book. In retrospect, it is the unreality of old issues, old quarrels, the utter insignificance of American Communism, Lovestoneism, Weisbordism, Trotskyism, that is the most profound impression he leaves. But why is the impression so much of triviality, boredom and fatigue? Actually, the irrelevance of the radical tradition to current politics is far less obvious than the insignificance of the conservative tradition. And in any event, the editorials in the *New Republic,* the fights on *Partisan Review,* the letters-to-the-editor in the *New International*—all this, though it seems to him now only vacuous, must have been important enough to Macdonald, since an essential part of his life was invested in it. Yet vigilant and unsparing as he is about himself, eager to be honest, to avoid exaggeration, he writes as if he cannot disguise from himself the utter meaninglessness and triviality of what it means to be an old "revolutionist." The feeble irony of this word, borrowed from the Russian (or from the English of Russians), illustrates the self-consciousness, the unease, the absurdity that he feels about his position. Nowadays there are many other old revolutionists—for some Marxism was not an adventure but part of one's very upbringing—who also feel that the experience was essentially accidental, sentimental, absurd; for them the Young People's Socialist League, the branch meeting, correspond to Sunday schools and to the Epworth League.

But despite this personal impression of triviality, there remains the dogmatism, the materialism, and sometimes the very real corruption of many old revolutionists. Macdonald points to this in passing, in an excellent commentary on the *New Leader*'s shameless flattery of politicians

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in power. Macdonald could have spared us some of his esthetic youth at Exeter and Yale and have used the space to comment on some of the professional patriots and religionists who have been thrown up by the left. Sainte-Beuve once remarked that in France people remain Catholics long after they have ceased to be Christians. Certain people in America today have remained "revolutionists" long after they have ceased to believe in anything whatever. In one of Macdonald's best chapters, his "letter" to Henry Luce on the *Time*-sponsored "cultural" magazine that William Schlamm was to edit, there is a pointed indication of what Schlamm—and later, the *National Review*—represents. But how much more could we have used on those other old "revolutionists" who, whether they take to Americanism, or to Judaism, or to Richard Nixon, or to the Catholic Church, are all "revolutionists" still, eternal ideologists, unrelenting fanatics. Macdonald is wrong in thinking that the left has lost all its potency and power. It is from the ranks of old revolutionists that have come labor advisers to Eisenhower, brain trusters to union racketeers, dopesters for McCarthy, "salesmen" of American democracy abroad, expert consultants to Hollywood on the Red Menace, professional informers to smut magazines.

The truth is that in this country, where there are hardly any genuine conservatives in power, old revolutionists constitute not a party but an information service. They are the ones who "know"—or who knew first; it was they who once saw the totalitarian beast face to face. After such knowledge, what forgiveness? Of themselves, their past? Of the "liberal," "innocent" world that still does not know? One path for the old revolutionist is that of power; another, Macdonald's, is that of personal confession, of vigilant truth-telling, no matter how absurd one sounds. Macdonald is not a Machiavellian old revolutionist, but he has the equally unprofitable illusion that "candor" is the same as truth. Although no one has been more critically and attentively concerned with the reconstruction of human values on the left, he is the kind of man who would rather sound foolish than take thought, who identifies honesty with self-deprecation, impatience with wit. It is a measure of our horror of certain impersonal slogans and anti-human dogmas that this sense of the individual person should be so anguished. But one would have liked from Macdonald less autobiography in this sense and more reflections on the history, the character, the possible future of the old revolutionist as a force in our culture. It is this lack of thoughtfulness, of objective concern, that gives his book so immediately transient a quality. The book would have been far more durable if it had been more openly and humbly the study of a generation, for it is a fact that,

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despite Macdonald's impatient assertiveness of his identity, his experiences seem to be almost completely "political," symbolic of a whole generation. If he had been able to think of his subject as the plight of a representative group of intellectuals, his book would have had a less self-conscious quality and a more obvious purpose. The "radical" experience, however unimportant, humorous, incredible it may seem to be, needs to be studied with detachment—for it has shown itself, in many hands, to lead to goals which are the very opposite of those which radicals profess.

Alfred Kazin

A POET'S MATURITY

ON POETRY AND POETS. By T. S. Eliot. Farrar, Straus and Cudahy. $4.50.

There are two sorts of criticism of poetry: the kind that poets write and the kind that everybody else writes. I agree with Mr. Eliot when he says that "the poet at the back of his mind . . . is always trying to defend the kind of poetry he is writing or to formulate the kind he wants to write." But I would go a good deal further and claim that this poets' criticism is in the long run the most useful kind both for poets themselves and for readers of poetry: because poetry is a way of living and one which implicitly tries to heal the artificial separation between life and art; and because poetry, ill-paid and often disliked even by poets themselves, cannot help at least aiming at disinterestedness. And whereas all the critics of the other or non-poetic kind get committed to their views, both of life and art, as other people get committed to prison, the poet, even if he has ground away as hard as any, can sometimes, in the long run, melt down his axes into a steel tonic for his verse. Or to change the metaphor, poetry is an enzyme which digests views. Abstract opinions are like cellulose: a poet has a second stomach.

I said "in the long run." What I am discussing is a phenomenon of maturation. Before long, we are told, the general increase in expectation of life will become a serious problem. Poetic gerontology may soon provide material for a thesis. Poets once died young either physically or poetically. It is only if, like Wordsworth and Yeats, they live to a fair age, that there can be some convincing opinion why they live or die as poets.

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If a poet "dies" it is usually because he has committed himself in one way or another to *le monde sérieux*: to one of the many conventions which take themselves seriously as a total way of life and erect their values into absolutes. The convention might of course be that either of a tycoon or a theologian, to name extremes of material and ideal whose values between them constitute a respectable society, or both; Wordsworth in becoming sexually respectable, in becoming a respected Poet Laureate and in writing ecclesiastical sonnets may have been trying to make the best of all the worlds.

If the aging eagle lives he does it by becoming more and more obstinately an authentic voice, as Hardy did, to some extent, Yeats even more so. The "voice" is here the key word. Certainly in the case of Yeats, what matures and lasts is the kind of vocalization which is so highly personal and individual both in rhythm and choice of language; this develops till in the end it is difficult to distinguish between man and poet, or to decide what is theme and what is poetry.

Of Mr. Eliot I should say with all the circumspection I can muster —this at least one ought to learn from him—that poetically speaking he has decided to live rather than to die. Whether he will actually give us more poetry seems uncertain; there are indications in the text that he may not. But the book is a reaffirmation of poetry as a way of life and of the poet as an authentic individual voice. And the two, the way of life, the moral maturation of the poet, and the voice, the craft, are no longer held apart but are brought together, almost fused.

All the essays in this book seem to me to be carefully selected and carefully placed in relation to one another so that they bring out this indivisible concern with moral and artistic maturation and thus seem to lead deliberately to the last of all, on Yeats. Mr. Eliot says "It is my experience that towards middle age a man has three choices: to stop writing altogether, to repeat himself with perhaps an increasing skill of virtuosity, or by taking thought to adapt himself to middle age and find a different way of working." And he says, shortly afterwards "But maturing as a poet means maturing as the whole man, experiencing new emotions appropriate to one's age, and with the same intensity as the emotions of youth."

"What Yeats did in the later and middle years" he says, "is a great and permanent example—which poets-to-come should study with reverence—of what I have called Character of the Artist: a kind of moral as well as intellectual excellence."

Yeats's morality, as Mr. Eliot makes clear, was in the vigor of his

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self-becoming and the honesty of his self-knowledge. A poet's morality does not necessarily differ in kind from anyone else's; but what it demands is the most exact expression in a personal idiom and rhythm, and this Yeats undoubtedly attained. One might say that poetry only shows what it is *about* by the time it has become the purest poetry; the moral import of his poetry depends on what the poet is doing with speech, which is at once his most individual and his most social or typically human characteristic.

That Mr. Eliot, at least in his criticism, accepts this fusion of the moral and the poetic, is brought out by several of the essays. On the evidence of this book one would say that he is "engaged" in the craft of verse—and moreover that he always has been. The choice of the word "engaged" instead of something like "occupied" is, I think, justified, because those which in this book he would call his "workshop" essays, those dealing with technical considerations including his own practice, have this moral import as much as any.

In *The Three Voices of Poetry* he begins "The first voice is the poet talking to himself—or to nobody. The second is the voice of the poet addressing an audience, whether large or small. The third is the voice of the poet when he attempts to create a dramatic character speaking in verse."

The order here suggests that the "progress of poesy" is toward the dramatic: that the poet, growing at all, tends to grow toward a dramatic form of communication. For generally even a dramatic monologue assumes that it could be understood and appreciated by an audience, and drama is essentially directness of speech, an attempt at the complete and instantaneous communication of an emotional situation.

This essay should be seen against the background of the one which, significantly I think, opens the book, *The Social Function of Poetry.* Here Mr. Eliot is talking of the "reason why we cannot afford to *stop* writing poetry":

> Most educated people take a certain pride in the great authors of their language, though they may never read them, just as they are proud of any other distinction of their country; a few authors even become celebrated enough to be mentioned occasionally in political speeches. But most people do not realize that this is not enough; that unless they go on producing great authors, and especially great poets, their language will deteriorate, their culture will deteriorate and perhaps be absorbed in a stronger one.

One point is of course that if we have no living literature we shall become more and more alienated from the literature of the past; unless

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we keep up continuity, our literature of the past will become more and more remote from us until it is as strange to us as the literature of a foreign people. For our language goes on changing; our way of life changes, under the pressure of material changes in our environment in all sorts of ways; and unless we have those few men who combine an exceptional sensibility with an exceptional power over words, our own ability, not merely to express, but even to feel any but the crudest emotions will degenerate.

This was delivered as a lecture in 1943, although it was not published until 1945. It therefore runs concurrently with the writing of *Notes Towards a Definition of Culture* which, though published only in 1948, was begun, as Mr. Eliot tells us, four or five years before. Its tone, however, strikes me, at least, as markedly different—in fact almost contradictory. I am referring not only to the mellowness and cheerfulness infusing the whole book—the thin-lipped assertions that poetry is only a "superior amusement" and that we ought to "scrutinize our reading by precise theological standards" have not only vanished but taken their damp souls with them. I mean something more positive than that. The general tone of *Notes Towards a Definition of Culture* was not only laudatory of times past, it was genteelly despairing of any future at all: the logical ground being apparently that there was no future except in the past where all good had centered round the parish pump; and the past is almost by definition unobtainable. That Mr. Eliot, as it were, with the other hand, was able to express a hope for poetry—which means, in terms of his opinions on drama and dramatic communication, a hope also for a people it may be worth while communicating with—is an important matter, even if there are as yet no signs that he has decided how that people would be constituted. It is also a very significant thing that he feels this essay is "worth preserving" and that it fits in with what is clearly a planned and not a haphazard selection of his past and current work.

What then is the principle of selection? The interest in poetry and the making of poetry is paramount. But the book is also about particular poets; and it is therefore also about poets as men, not, admittedly, in the circumstantial biographical sense, but as whole minds in contact with their world. The choice of poets might nevertheless seem at first sight unusual and in need of explanation. Milton, Goethe, yes, not remarkable. But Sir John Davies, Byron, Kipling and Yeats. What on earth have all these in common in Mr. Eliot's mind? There is the old quest for the philosopher-poet: Davies, for example, had, in Mr. Eliot's opinion, some marked capacity for fusing thought and feeling and on this ground—admitting the daring and actual disparity of the com-

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parison—he compares him with Dante. Over the other names I cannot go into detail, but it seems to me that what Mr. Eliot sees in them is honesty of self-revelation, extending in some cases to the search for subjective truth and unity of consciousness. (I don't say that I think he is correct in all cases.)

In fact what is still one of Mr. Eliot's most profound concerns—and it is the one which is central to this volume—is the famous dissociation of sensibility. This was one of his formulae which had, as he says, a success in the world astonishing to its author. It was the belief that in the seventeenth century a split in thought and feeling took place from which poetry in particular has never quite recovered. Those who supported Mr. Eliot's opinion often attributed the dissociation to the seventeenth century development of science. Mr. Eliot did not actually so far commit himself about the sciences, although it appeared he did not like them; what he did say was that the sources of this dissociation were Milton and Dryden and that what they affected was the language of poetry. As a purely poetic influence Milton was anathema to Mr. Eliot, who has now however come to terms with him, in two essays almost entirely concerned with him as a poetic practitioner,

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which are in keeping with an admirably coherent book—and so ostensibly Mr. Eliot's sub-recantation is due to the belief that "poets are sufficiently liberated from Milton's reputation to approach the study of his work without danger, and with profit to their poetry and the English language."

I find this still lukewarm license to young practitioners not altogether convincing and indeed obscure. He accounts for Milton's rhythmic and verbal peculiarities in terms of the fact that he was a blind musician. But there is a note of reconciliation and amendment throughout the book toward poets whom he feels he has disparaged in human terms. And it almost looks as if he is falling backwards in his endeavor to exclude theology and religion from literary application. Therefore I wonder if a paragraph in one of the Milton essays, which seems significant and is obscure, is not, after all, a perfunctory genuflection to his earlier views:

> I believe that the general affirmation represented by the phrase "dissociation of sensibility" . . . retains some validity. . . . All we can say is that something like this did happen, that it had something to do with the Civil War, that it would even be unwise to say it was caused by the Civil War; that we must seek the causes in Europe, not in England alone; and for what these causes were, we may dig and dig until we get to a depth at which words and concepts fail us.

I do not think that this is merely the old oracular elusiveness which Mr. Eliot sometimes yielded to when his philosophical and logical grounds were weak. But it makes me wonder whether the famous "monarchical in politics" was not very curiously literal: whether Mr. Eliot really hankered after the divine right of kings, might even perhaps, who knows, have toasted the King over the Water; and perhaps really attributed the dissociation of sensibility to Erastianism—whether the split in sensibility really meant the split between Church and State!

However that may be it looks to me as if Mr. Eliot's poetic second stomach has been ruminating profoundly and that the more indigestible of his eccentric "orthodoxies" are being broken down.

Kathleen Nott

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CRITICISM AT ITS BEST

THE RISE OF THE NOVEL. By Ian Watt. University of California Press. $5.

American criticism has fallen upon quiet days. A vast production continues from one season to the next, but there has been an ebbing of the disputatious passions of a decade ago, when literary people could work themselves up to argument about the New Criticism. In part this is due to the remarkable capacity of our culture for assimilating and devitalizing all ideas, in part to the fact that the New Criticism has apparently exhausted itself through over-assertiveness. The result must obviously be a rather dull "literary atmosphere"; nonetheless it is possible that during the next decade there will be a considerable amount of distinguished criticism written by men who have profited from the risks of their elders and are content to be eclectics rather than pioneers. Those of us who do not find this prospect of isolated achievements inspiring should beware of dismissing it too easily. Books continue to be written by solitary persons, not by teams or tendencies.

These observations find some grounding in Mr. Ian Watt's *The Rise of the Novel,* a first-rate work of criticism that would surely have been impossible without the crossing influences of the various critical schools of the past few decades, yet is admirably free from the sectarian dogmatism that has disfigured most of them. Traditional literary scholarship, psychoanalysis, the functional school of modern sociology, Marxism, the close analysis of texts—these and more come into play in *The Rise of the Novel,* but as elements that have been assimilated by the critic's sensibility rather than as "methods" applied with programmatic intention. Even as one sees this complex of influences behind Mr. Watt's criticism, it remains a criticism firmly disciplined, secure and single-voiced. When, for example, he discusses *Robinson Crusoe* as an economic myth he inevitably turns to Marx, but not in order to "use" Marxism as still another device in the critical repertoire. He has read Marx, learned what he could, kept his head and gone his way, so that the insights borrowed from Marx become his own possession, inseparable from his awareness as a whole. As a result, the usual chatter about critical approaches becomes irrelevant; what matters is watching a superior mind at work, sharing in its discoveries and enjoying the privilege of disagreement.

Mr. Watt has chosen to write about the eighteenth century English

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novel, an area that has largely been neglected by modern critics and has perhaps received too much attention, of the hearty defensive sort, from the scholars. *The Rise of the Novel* concentrates upon Defoe and Richardson, to great effect with the former and brilliantly with the latter; a concluding section on Fielding seems, by comparison, incomplete. Now these are not easy writers for the modern critic to handle. Except in occasional passages their work resists the techniques of close textual analysis, and even when such analysis proves locally useful it can easily divert one from apprehending thematic and structural wholes. The usual study of character in terms of psychological shadings and motivations is of limited value, yielding very little in Defoe and only a bit more in Fielding. (As Mr. Watt observes: "Defoe does not so much portray his heroine's character [in *Moll Flanders*] as assume its reality in every action . . .—if we accede to the reality of the deed, it is difficult to challenge the reality of the doer.") The practice, inherited from romanticism, of judging a work of literature by the intensity of emotion it arouses in the reader rather than by the decorum with which it meets the requirements of traditional genres or the intelligence with which it satisfies a traditional moral standard, is usually a poor preparation for reading any eighteenth century English novelist except, at times, Richardson. Even in his case the romantic criterion can be misleading: it tempts one to confuse the *Clarissa* he intended to write with the *Clarissa* we think we read. When applied to Fielding and Smollett, the expectation of intensity can result in a total misunderstanding. One repeatedly hears bright students, only slightly mimicking their elders, ask why Tom Jones fails to grow in moral stature—a question that reveals how tyrannical the assumptions of the modern, or any other, literary outlook can be.

Mr. Watt transforms these difficulties into advantages: they become the underlying concerns of his book, the implicit problems behind the explicit topics. The result is a reading of Defoe and Richardson which, if it does not make them seem as attractive or "necessary" to us as Hardy or James, does permit that grasp of the work in its context which is indispensable for any genuine appreciation. The historical imagination leads to—becomes—the literary imagination. And meanwhile not the least value of *The Rise of the Novel* is that in reading it one realizes how rash was Mr. Leavis's suggestion that the eighteenth century English novelists are, in the main, barely worth the attention of a mature mind.

Mr. Watt begins with a compressed discussion of "formal realism," by which he means the cluster of those elements of form differentiating

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the novel from earlier prose fiction. He skillfully relates the early English novel to the growth of philosophical realism, which provided not doctrine but "a critical, anti-traditional and innovating temper," thereby encouraging "the study of the particulars of experience." In Defoe, for example, the "total subordination of the plot to the pattern of the autobiographical memoir is as defiant an assertion of the primacy of individual experience in the novel as Descartes's *cogito ergo sum* in philosophy." Mr. Watt then examines the novel's unprecedented concentration upon the texture of daily experience through "its employment of a much more minutely discriminated time-scale than had previously been employed in narrative"; its dependence on the idea of causality as a means of ordering large quantities of behavior; its commitment to the assumptions of historicity; its concern with establishing a background of spatial familiarity and density; and above all, its employment of language in a manner far more "referential . . . than in other literary forms, [so that] the genre itself works by exhaustive presentation rather than by elegant concentration." This last insight is especially valuable, since it undercuts a great deal of fruitless debate as

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to whether novelists like Defoe and Richardson (or Dreiser and Hardy) "wrote well."

The eighteenth century novel, emerging as the voice of a subculture, is frequently given to the accumulation of moments of experience. The hunger for typical incident, the sheer delight in massed representation is something that the modern critic, trained according to the recipes of the "art novel," finds difficult to appreciate. Contemporary readers, however, cared less about Moll Flanders's moral judgments than about what was happening to her; they admired her capacity for bouncing back and getting on; and this response, while it can be taken as a sign of the lapse or decline of values attendent on the rise of the commercial middle class, also reflects something else: a reordering of moral needs in an era of increasing secularization. When Virginia Woolf praised Moll as a generous and candid rogue who anticipated certain attitudes of feminism, she was guilty of romantic exaggeration; but she was closer to the spirit of the book than is Mr. Mark Schorer when he writes that it is "our classic revelation of the mercantile mind."

Mr. Watt is at his best in a long section on Richardson. He ranges with great assurance among such related topics as the new role of women and the crisis of marriage in eighteenth century England, both of which gave a sudden touch of peril and excitement to the fates of the Pamelas and Clarissas; the little-noticed humor which winds its way through Richardson's novels; the curious transition in his mind from the gnawing introspectiveness of Puritanism to an obsession with sexual maneuver and conquest; the feminization of sensibility which led Richardson to an endless fondling of domestic detail and then, as a sort of distorted reflection of this, to a monstrous magnification of private relationships; the interplay of class values and sexual impulses; and the way in which conscious purposes become inseparable from unconscious motifs. What emerges is a novel with three levels of action. The central one is a sustained and serious Christian morality; above it spires a closely related drama of the growth of a self that has been tested in worldly martyrdom and humiliation as a preparation for union with the bridegroom Christ; and below there lurks a turbid fantasy of ravishment, assault and savored masochism. All of this Mr. Watt presents with such richness and *éclat* that one is bewildered at remembering F. R. Leavis's dictum that "it's no use pretending Richardson can ever be made a current classic again."

As with Richardson, the central problem in reading Defoe is to determine the relation between the plenitude of presented matter and

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the scheme of moral significance that may lend it order. Perhaps this problem is ultimately insoluble, Defoe himself having been so uncertain as to what he was doing. Yet Mr. Watt's treatment of Moll as Defoe's moral and spiritual surrogate and his consequent minimizing of the possibility that an ironic distance exists between Defoe and his characters, seems to me at least debatable.

The problem of the moral intention and effect of Defoe's novels, which has interested not only the recent critics but such earlier students of his work as Gildon, Coleridge and Leslie Stephen, can finally be settled—if at all—only by a close scrutiny of his text. Mr. Watt does provide such a scrutiny, but despite its many points of illumination it does not seem to me quite convincing. For one thing, he fails to allow for the likelihood that Defoe's worldliness—the worldliness of a secular mind expressing itself through an inherited religious vocabulary and "sincerely" devoted to vestigial religious emotions when remembering to feel them—came through not merely in a bourgeois preoccupation with money and things but also in a certain shrewdness of perception. This shrewdness, it is true, does not reach the full moral criticism implied by the modern usage of the word "irony"; nor does it involve a full critique of the mercantile ethic; but it does result in a sly and humorous discounting of Moll's pretensions. To suppose that we must choose irrevocably between Defoe as a purveyor of spicy and scandalous anecdotes and Defoe as a deep ironic critic of Moll's morality seems to me a mistake; the truth is probably that at different moments he approached these roles with whatever emphasis struck him as opportune or pleasing.

Defoe was not merely an exemplar of the bourgeois mind: he was also a spunky rascal, a spy and double agent, an adventurer who probably forged for Robert Harley a memoir supposed to have been written by an envoy of Louis XIV and who composed the far more remarkable forgery called *The Shortest Way With the Dissenters.* One reason modern critics tend to see Defoe's mind as more drab and humorless than it need be seen, is that our notion of the bourgeois, largely shaped for us by the nineteenth century French novel, is too narrow. We tend to forget that at the stage of "risk capital" the bourgeois can be adventurous. Defoe, after all, lived in London, not next door to Charles Bovary; he was a man of the world, even if generally on its lower margin.

A German scholar, Rudolf Stamm, has provided us with a version of Defoe that best fits what we know of his life and can make of his work. Stamm sees Defoe as a figure of protean and elusive worldliness,

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an adventurer with a taste for both bourgeois solidity and religious appurtenances, an impersonator of roles not merely in his novels but throughout a lifetime of risks. And while Mr. Watt is aware of Stamm's portrait, he does not, I think, give it sufficient credence.

Still, disagreements of this kind are the very heart of literary life, and I find myself grateful to Mr. Watt for stimulating me to express them. At the very least, I hope, it will be clear that his book should be read by everyone interested in the novel or in literary criticism. It is that rare thing: a model of excellence.

Irving Howe

THE PAST SURVIVED

LEFTOVER LIFE TO KILL. By Caitlin Thomas. Atlantic-Little, Brown. $4.50.

This book offers the reviewer a peculiar choice between finding the revelations it contains to be the truth—the ugly, though to a woman reassuring, universal facts of the case—or finding them to be no more than a sort of interesting clue to the character of its author and the nature of her special predicament.

One's first temptation is to do the latter, to stand off and "understand" Mrs. Thomas. She herself makes this very easy by presenting an account of just the kind of behavior one can automatically dissociate oneself from, the behavior of a perverse, self-destructive, self-dramatizing, nail-biting drunk. You can, moreover, be doubly superior to her by being withal sympathetic: "understanding" her drinking, giving self-destruction its basis in a higher decency, conceding to poets' wives, as to their husbands, the right to trespass on all our plainer social sensibilities. Then there is her prose, which can be right, intelligent, effective, sometimes marvelously witty (as, particularly, in her descriptions of some American women she has known), but which always manages to pull your attention right back from whatever is being observed to the kind of observation she is making about it.

Clearly the easiest and most workable way of dealing with Mrs. Thomas is to keep in mind the fact that she was married to the most adulated, indulged, petted poet of our time. According to John Malcolm Brinnin, whose *Dylan Thomas in America* this book was purportedly written to answer, Caitlin bitterly resented her husband, resented his friends, resented the attention paid to him, resented—Brinnin's hint is

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there—even his poetry, blooming on the ashheap of her own domestic worries and motherhood. She was hysterical about Dylan's visits to America, particularly when she came with him and was an appendage to his being wined, dined, oh-Dylaned, and tumbled into bed by everything from bobby sox to mink coats, mostly whatever happened to be around; when, in short, he was cashing in on his poetry in the way it is possible for a poet to do only at the great American pay-window. (Brinnin was shocked, and not above saying so, to see the orderly and seemingly indifferent treatment accorded Thomas in his London haunts.) She made dreadful scenes, was unspeakably rude to innocent bystanders, she sulked, she fought—she and Dylan more than once smashed up a house they happened to be visiting, furniture, china, bric-a-brac and all. She complained about Dylan to his friends, she was forever demanding money and nagging him about it, at the same time fully participating with him in the insane, compulsive squandering that left them broke on a more than handsome income. Throughout Brinnin's treatment of her there is somehow the implication that Caitlin, as Dylan's wife, should have granted him his poet's permit, should in fact have been the first person in the world rather than the last to forego ordinary demands on him. (For my part, I see no reason to be as impressed as either Brinnin or Caitlin herself seems to be with her ferocity against America. Here she was, watching her husband hanging by the teeth in an aerial spin, the crowds below egging him on largely to satisfy their own craving for a thrill, he taking the applause as an obligation to go still further—and she, the wife, regarding the whole business as Dylan's evasion of the kind of mucking through life that she felt necessary to them both and to their marriage. Why should she not have hated America? Why should she not have whispered to Dylan before he went on-stage for a poetry reading, "Remember, they're all dirt"?)

So now we understand. Dylan dies, and Caitlin writes a book. There is where the dog lay buried, Caitlin is a writer. (There can be no mistake about that: for all the confessing, tearing of flesh, suffering, and defiant apologizing in *Leftover Life,* what its author was really doing with the book was *writing* it.) A crude, nasty idea, but an inevitable one; and no less nasty were it to be softened by the complicated language of insight. She is a cultural-psychological phenomenon, and a familiar one. If she is a writer now, then she must in some way have been a writer all along—married to a brilliantly successful poet. The storm that was a major part of their life together and that breaks with its final violence over Caitlin after Dylan's death, was a magnified-by-

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personality version of a literary marriage. Her hatreds and jealousies of her husband, her guilt and female self-hatred, her assertive, protective, and resentful feelings about motherhood, all this can be seen in the perspective of a woman frantically unsure, as they say in the field, of her role, immature—as most lady writers must be, in the sense that their spiritual and worldly ambitions keep them in a constant state of anxiety about settling for just those things adulthood offers women—married to a man who, no matter what gutters he dragged through, blind drunk and on his knees, was first and foremost the author of those poems; and a man, it must be added, with a few childish demands of his own to make, and knowing how to impose them on the world far more successfully than she.

But all of it, the marriage, the violent, drink-fogged, chaotic life with Dylan, the entire business of living at the outer edge of experience—and even once toppling over into madness—do not really account for *Leftover Life*. Dylan was an accident of Caitlin's biography: she might, after all, have married someone else; like all particular facts of a personal history he is ineradicable and yet fortuitous. If he left her with a load of pain and guilt and bewilderment she will never be able to clear away, he could also have been her salvation. (Imagine a woman with the sense of sin and self-destruction that shrieks from these pages married to a soft man or a gentle man—who might have thought it his part to give her something!) As it was, Dylan's shocking death forced her to examine the meaning of her life and her future. The examination was postponed: first in an American sanitarium, then in Laugharne, Wales, where she returned with Dylan's body and buried him and where, by her account, she spent the first flush of her new lonely life making raids on the entire male population of the village. But finally she took herself and her youngest child, Colm, age five, to the island of Elba "to sort things out" or "to pull herself together" or whatever is the going cliché in these matters. And there she found the means to take a long look at herself and be ultimately honest. Nothing else that happened on Elba and nothing she says about it, however foolish, can obscure that real achievement.

True, a good deal of what she writes about is simply the usual experience of widowhood. She calls the life ahead of her "leftover." She is forever trying and failing, at least so far as the reader is concerned, to evoke a living image of her husband. She reproaches herself for time wasted in hostility or disbelief when death was so near. She expresses certain unserious impulses to suicide. Her very visit to Elba is the classic journey of a widow to the scene of an earlier happiness. Her real

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agony on that dreary island, however, is her discovery of strength. She wants to be weaker, more mortal, than Dylan—but he is dead and she alive—weaker than all the men in Laugharne and on Elba whom she uses "to kill the critically carping maiden aunt of a mind that nagged the prostrate soul out of me." But she cannot. Her strength does not lie in any ability to pull herself together—that she refuses ever to do. The solemn little adolescent girl that lurks inside the thoroughly intelligent and even hard-headed woman has set out to be bad and never does, as little girls never can except with the proper outside pressure, find a way to stop. At the end she leaves Elba having shocked and antagonized its strictly decorous population and chanting "All the king's horses, and all the king's men, couldn't put Caitlin Thomas together again."

She knows, though, that she is going to endure. The discovery of one's endurance is always shocking, morally revolting. Perhaps indeed it should be kept a secret. But to Caitlin it comes with everything she does and everything that happens to her, and the more she screams and is sick at herself the more the truth of it hangs on. And what Caitlin knows, she admits: that any trifle, or even any cheap substitute for a trifle, will do for the making of something she can call a life. She says at one point:

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If I seem to have given too much importance to my piddling, mock, frivolous affairs, it is not that I think they are important, but that, to live at all, it is necessary to have the illusion of something going on. They were but fly spots in the dense mesh of the day; but at night it is important for me to dream that I am looking forward to meeting somebody tomorrow.

The "somebody" she was looking forward to meeting was Joseph, a nineteen-year-old iron miner who had been a companion to her little boy and had then become her lover. The affair with Joseph—with whom she was genuinely in love but who was just a young boy grasping at what he thought might be the chance for him to leave the mines and better himself—was a situation loaded with humiliation for her, just as being the town whore of Laugharne had been. But no matter how she arranged to make a fool of herself, her experiences after all were but a collection of the "fly spots" that made up her enduring female existence.

The real indignity that Caitlin learned to suffer on Elba—is that she has no dignity. There is little moral beauty in such indestructability; the truth is we do not, certainly cannot, admire it. A man—even Dylan, whose brain and body put an end to the terrible toll he demanded of them—who cannot bear certain defeats, or if he does, announces to the world by his very defeated existence that he has succumbed to them, puts her kind of strength to shame.

This shame is the shame that Caitlin Thomas feels and makes her readers feel for her. She is leftover, not with a life to kill, but with her muck and her old desires and her endurance. Her book is in the end upsetting and embarrassing. But she has chosen not to pretend that she is a hero. This, for a sensitive woman, is its own very great heroism.

Midge Decter

GORKY AND TOMLIN

ARSHILE GORKY. By Ethel K. Schwabacher. Macmillan. $8.50.
BRADLEY WALKER TOMLIN. By John I. H. Baur. Macmillan. $4.00.

Elegance and agony: a painter's reputation can almost sink under the weight of those ideas, especially if he is no longer around to combat it. Arshile Gorky died in 1948, Bradley Walker Tomlin in 1953. Fortunately, their work has been exhibited often enough since then, but

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Gorky was admittedly the painter of modern agony, and Tomlin's impulse to elegance was profound.

The two books I have to review appear in conjunction with the exhibition of Tomlin's work at the Whitney Museum this fall and that of Gorky's at the Janis Gallery in December. Mr. Baur, the author of the Tomlin book, is Curator of the Whitney Museum; Mrs. Schwabacher is a painter, and for many years was close to Gorky as a pupil and a friend. The book on Gorky is large and handsome, with seventy black and white illustrations and eight color plates; its extensive text alternates between criticism and biography, discussing individual pictures as well as tracing personal and aesthetic tendencies. Mr. Baur's essay is much briefer and the book has perhaps half as many illustrations; its range is clearly more restricted; it also includes short but interesting remarks about Tomlin by Guston, Motherwell, Duncan Phillips, and Frederick Wight. Mr. Baur's view of Tomlin is less ambitious, less complete, and consequently less diffuse than Mrs. Schwabacher's of Gorky. She has painstakingly reconstructed Gorky's early life, collected data about his first years in America, gathered memories and impressions, family correspondence, details of his WPA and Newark Airport projects, early reviews of his work, etc. She attributes a great deal of importance to Gorky's Armenian origins, perhaps too much: if one did not know his paintings, he could seem like a kind of Chagall. But she has much less point of view about Gorky as an artist than Mr. Baur does of Tomlin in the same role.

Although very different, the careers of Gorky and Tomlin show certain similarities. Both died at the peak of their artistic power, Gorky by suicide after a series of tragically destructive events, Tomlin of a heart attack. Their work was not at all alike, but both developed their true powers late, after long apprenticeship and submission to other influences. Tomlin had done commercial art and teaching, was closely associated with the painter Frank London, worked in a realist and then cubist style; the influence of surrealism, and of painters such as Gottlieb, Pollock, and Motherwell, was combined with his own feeling for structure, to emerge into his late style. Gorky set himself Cézanne, Picasso, and Miro as masters, as well as the Old Masters themselves; was for years considered imitative, and then, through the influence of Matta and of surrealism, was able to achieve the coherence of his last great works. (It is interesting to see both painters being liberated by surrealism, which increasingly appears as a remarkable and curious force, capable of far-reaching effects, and more alive when not in the hands of its practitioners.) Although both Gorky and Tomlin have their sig-

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nificant places in the history of advanced painting, their relative positions and powers may be uncertain: most of Gorky's work, and much of Tomlin's precede the abstract expressionism of the present.

In her discussion of Gorky's importance, Mrs. Schwabacher strenuously resists the notion advanced by Clement Greenberg that Gorky's painting was an end and not a beginning, so far as the history of art is concerned; she insists that younger painters have been influenced by Gorky, creatively, and that his work points to the future. Quite possibly she has in mind the force of his genius, the power of his dedication, the tragedy of his life, but nowhere does she suggest what she thinks younger painters will learn or have learned from him. Mr. Baur does not speak of Tomlin's possible influence on other painters, but he speculates more openly on Tomlin's possible directions had he lived.

In their last pictures, it seems to me, both painters indicated that they might have gone on to work rather differently if their careers had not finished so abruptly. Mrs. Schwabacher, in her admiration for Gorky's great works, sees his *Last Painting*[1] as "non-art"; on the contrary, I would single out that picture for its hints of future possibilities. It is the first of Gorky's pictures, with the exception of *The Limit,* to be not at all a painting of a picture, or a picture of a scene however shallow, abstract or surrealist. It suggests a more recent conception of the surface and of space, such as we find in the work of Still, Motherwell, Kline, and Rothko. As for Tomlin, whose death occurred five years later than Gorky's, he left work which had already reached a later stage, almost as if art were acting independently of its artists. Around the time Gorky died, Tomlin, influenced by Gottlieb, developed his all-over style of white ribbon-y forms which, in the year before his

1 My reference is to *Last Painting 1948* as listed in Mrs. Schwabacher's book, not to the picture of the same name and date listed in the catalogue of the Janis Gallery exhibition.

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death, changed to the all-over spots of his last works. Those pictures have a tendency all to look like the same picture; this may be a clue that something was about to happen. I think the spots would have assumed a more prominent role, especially with respect to indeterminate depth; they might have disappeared, to be replaced, or transformed into other structures accomplishing different tasks. Gorky doesn't seem to have reacted to the all-over development, but his last picture suggests that he might have learned from it without the need to do it himself. *Agony, Diary of a Seducer, The Calendars, The Betrothal II, The Limit* are masterpieces of 1945-47 (the early days of the all-over convention); *Last Painting 1948* could have been painted today.

Sonya Rudikoff

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